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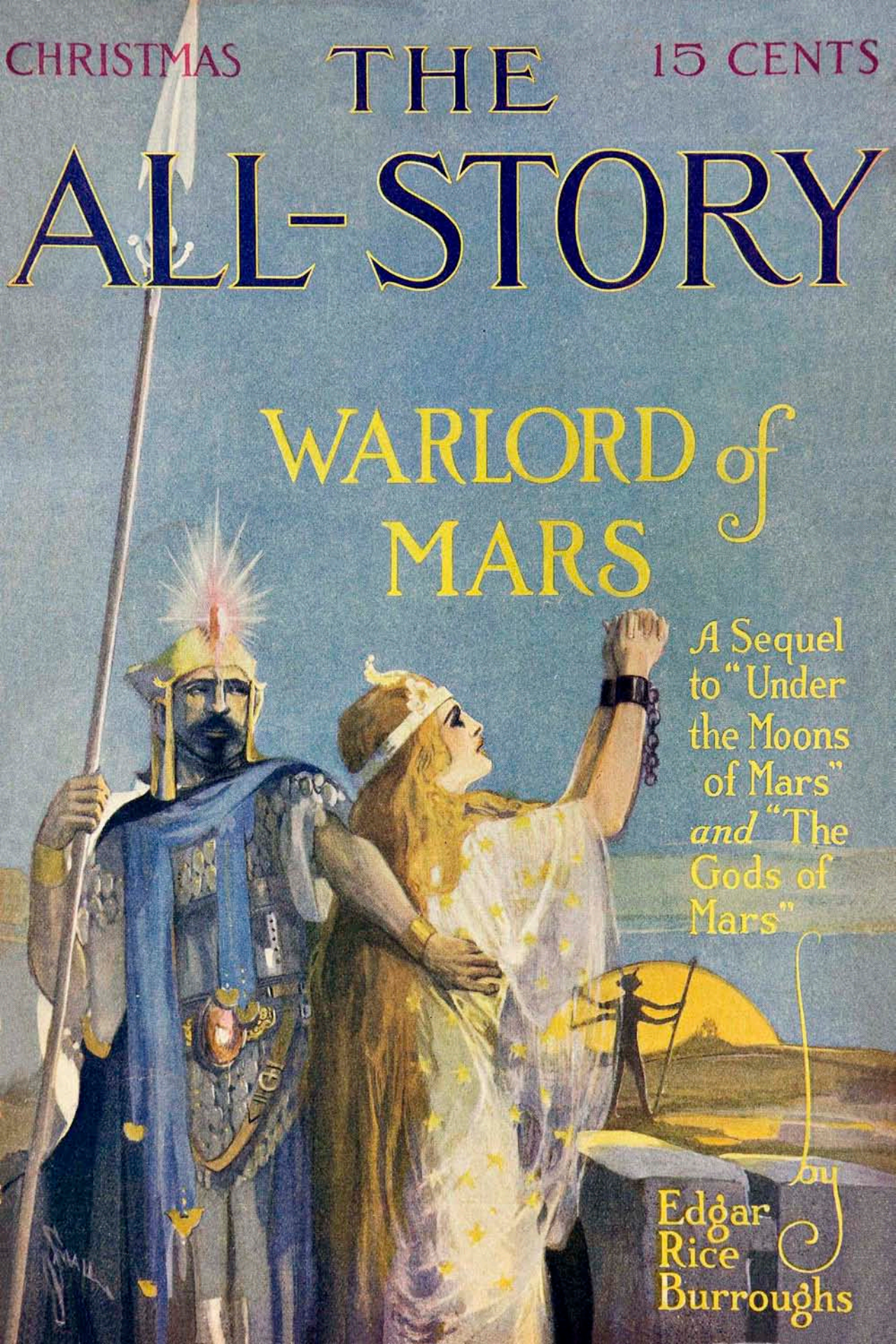

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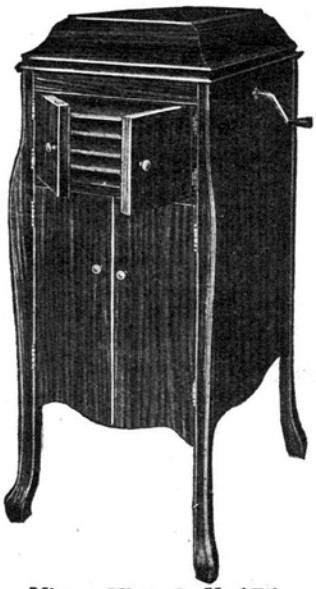

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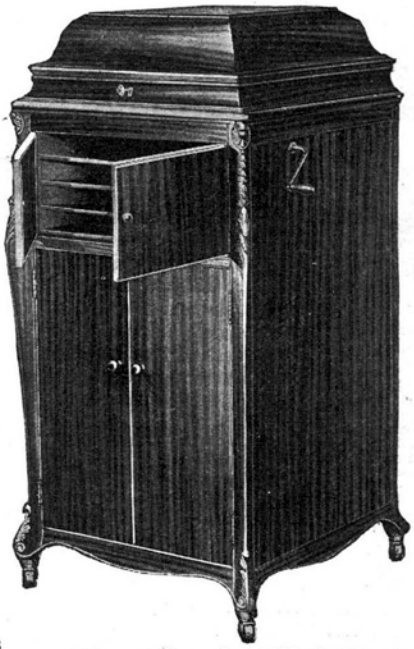

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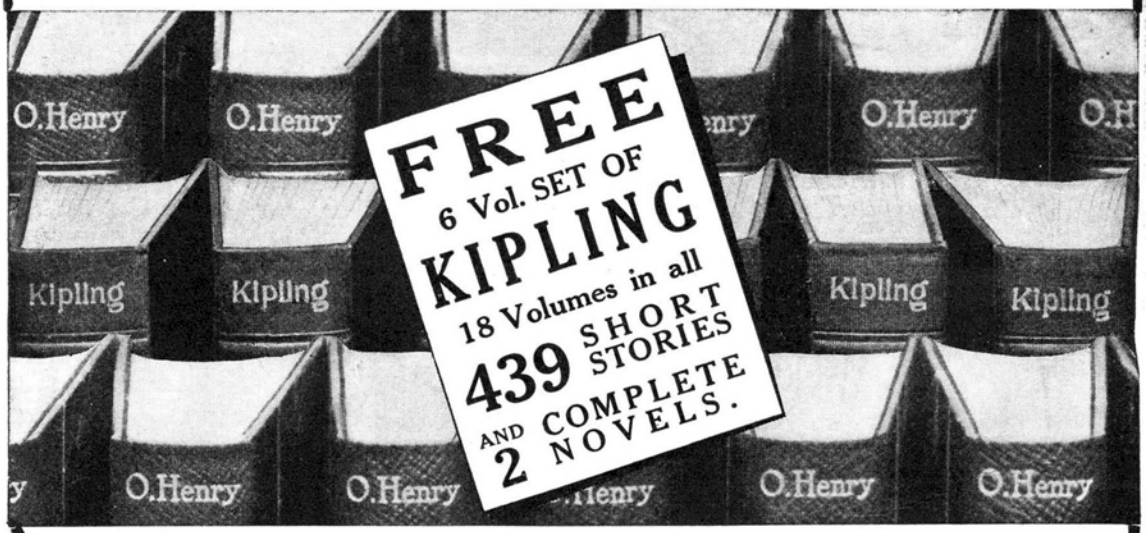

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THE ALL-STORY

VOL. XXVII DECEMBER, 1913. No. 4

A Thieves' Comedy

by

Simeon Robertson

A BOOK—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEED SYSONSBY SOWED.

WE later-day Didderingtons have had no particular reason to refer back to July 4, 1776, with enthusiasm.

At the time of which I write—September, 19—, I was the only one of the name, and was not terribly proud of the distinction under the circumstances, the explanation of which is an awful fag, but must be got over with if the rest of the stuff I am going to write is to have any sense at all.

Your revolution had nothing to do with it; but upon the day you decided to lick us, and your lithographers began to turn out the annual supply of George Washingtons, my great-great-grandfather, the eighth Earl of Didderington, was born.

He is really responsible for this story.

From birth to marriage, and thence to death, he was a deuce of a chap—a rotter—fond of dueling with people he could kill, of gambling, and drinking, and of other men's wives.

Didderington families have always been small. Like myself, he was an only child, and I suppose, being heir to an earldom, there were not a few marriageable ladies who found it possible to overlook his beastly habits. In any case, one foolish woman married him.

They had two children, a son and a

daughter, who were four and two years of age respectively when their father came into the title in 1810.

He played ducks and drakes with everything. His wife died in 1832, literally killed by his brutality, and in the same year his daughter, refusing to be payment for one of his horrible gambling debts to some *roué* who wanted to marry her, left Diddering-ton Park very suddenly one evening with Bob Dolliver, the lodgekeeper's son, and neither was ever seen or heard of again.

The earl died as he had lived — swiftly—in 1836. Some say a woman shot him in revenge for a particuarly devilish trick he had played upon her or hers.

The facts are clouded, but in any case he was found lying upon his face inside the main entrance gate of the park with an ugly bullet hole in the back of his head.

But there was little relief in that for the Didderington exchequer.

His son — brother of the girl who ran away — was just as much of an ass as the father, though in a different way. He married a woman who took charge of his check-book and used it, by Jove, as if she were issuing soap coupons. They, in turn, were blessed with an heir whose one idea in life appears to have been to do as mother had done.

That he was rather successful, my father probably learned when he became the eleventh Earl of Diddering-ton.

In spite of his antecedents, my father was everything worth while—that is, he was a gentleman and a scholar, and even spoke in the House of Lords once or twice, to prove that he was also a patriot.

But, poor old chap, he had no idea of business, and my mother died when I was born.

I am the last of the Didderingtons —without a relative in the whole wide world.

Upon my father's death I fell heir to the title and a lot of legal phraseology explaining why the Diddering-ton estates did not belong to me.

I went through those mortgages like the six hundred at Balaklava — mortgages to right of me, mortgages to left of me, volleying and thundering interest-notices like grape-shot. I was in a horrible fix.

Most of the cannons belonged to a chap named Rollins — Theodore D. Rollins.

I had never heard of the beggar before, but my lawyers told me he was an American who appeared anxious to take up all the mortgages, and had already secured several that had not originally been held by him.

There were really only two parcels of the Didderington estates he had not snapped up.

One was a small piece of farmland which I did not care a rap about, and the other was a hundred square yards or thereabouts of Didderington Park, including the lodge at the gates.

The latter was a rather strategetical piece of property. Including the principal entrance, the lodge and the first hundred yards of the main carriage drive, the owner of it could, if he cared, close the whole place up and force the proprietor of the rest of the park to go to a jolly lot of expense building a new road and a new entrance for himself.

That mortgage was held by a shrewd old chap named Silas Anson, who was not much given to sentiment. He did not care a hang whether the Didderingtons were, after centuries of residence there, thrown out of Diddering-ton Park or not, and as I knew perfectly well that I could not hold out for more than two or three years at most, meeting interest-bills only, there wasn't a chance in a thousand that I would be able to take up the mortgage on the lodge when it fell due in March of the coming year.

The amount was ten thousand pounds.

If I could not find it within six

months Anson would, of course, sell the property to the highest bidder.

Rollins!

I could almost feel that beggar waiting for March to come round, and, naturally, I was very eager to know why he was trying to close me out. It isn't very nice to have some one you don't know buying your place over your head.

That Rollins chap could stand in the main gateway with a bill of sale in lieu of a flaming sword and bar me from the domains of my ancestors, as old Timothy Dolliver, great-grandson of the original Dolliver, used to keep out picnic parties on our "closed" days.

Timothy was the last of the Dollivers to stand guard over our gateway. He had six daughters, but no son, and I think the fact preyed upon his mind toward the end. A Dolliver had always been lodgekeeper at Didderington Park, but, as he said himself at the birth of each daughter:

"Lasses are nowt—nowt, I tell ee—but for marryin' an' changin' their names!"

To return to business—my rents and so forth barely cared for the huge loans made in times past, and when one attempts to keep up a place like Didderington Park, and have oneself live up to it, the result is obvious to any one who can put two and two successfully together.

I thought that over. It wasn't a bit difficult to realize that expenses must be cut in half and cut again, and that I must make money somehow or other.

But I couldn't think of a single thing. I was stumped completely—middle wicket.

So I went to the club and told Sysonsby about it.

Sysonsby fagged for me at Eton, and he is quite as much of an ass now as he was then, but he is the only chap I can get to listen to me. All the others are afraid I have got the Didderington habit of borrowing money, but as Sysonsby hasn't got any to lend, he doesn't care.

He said quite frankly after I had explained things to him:

"Didder, you're a chump. If I had your advantages do you suppose I'd hang round this club jingling a few pennies in my pocket:

"You seem to forget that you're an earl—a knight of the strawberry-leaf, with a seat in the House of Lords. That you are an idiot does not matter.

"If you will read the list of imports once a month you shall find that several million dollars' worth of American heiress has been brought to our shores for the purpose of dusting off musty coronets and renovating decadent ancestral halls. Of course, I must admit, Didderington is a devil of a name to ask any woman to take; but you could at least try it."

I won't repeat verbatim what I said, but I told him I'd be hanged if I would. I am not that sort of a chap.

Sysonsby seemed bottled for a bit—quite disappointed; then, all at once, he slapped his knee. And when that beggar slaps his knee one can expect something almost original.

"I have it!" he exclaimed so loudly that an old chap napping in a nearby chair jumped, gaped, and glared at Sysonsby, so that he modulated his enthusiasm a little.

"You have what?" I asked, and nodded to one of the club waiters to bring the "usual."

"The whole plot. And if it isn't right it ought to be. It's too good to be wrong."

"Wait for the drinks, old chap; I may need mine after you've told it worse than I do now."

"Oh, bosh! It's quite pretty in its way. Theodore D. Rollins you said the chap's name was?"

I nodded.

"Well, it's quite simple," Sysonsby continued with that idiotic assurance of his. "Rollins is a millionaire, of course, and has a daughter with an eye upon the peerage.

"Two or three of her chums have landed coronets, and she is simply aching to call herself countess of something or other. She is an only daughter. Rollins would buy her the moon if he could—and he has learned about you, looked you up, found that you batted a few centuries for Surrey last year; that you can sit on a horse well enough to play on a second-grade polo four—that you stand seventy-one and a half inches in your socks; that you have a passable countenance and are not such a fool as you look.

"One can't have everything, so he has decided to put up with your name, and when he has bought up all the Didderington mortgages he shall come to you and say: 'Young man, I own the castles and the lands of your ancestors. All I need to complete the business is that thing you stick on your head on state occasions, and I guess I've got to get you to get that. I have a daughter—' and the thing is done.

"Of course, to make it novelettish, you've got to meet her somewhere before the old chap comes on the scene at all, and fall in love with her and she with you, without either of you knowing who the other is. She must be ravishingly beautiful, and you — well —you can't be helped. Rollins is paying for it, so I have no reason to complain."

The waiter came and departed. I drank deeply before I replied, and since there were other club members in the smoking-room, of course, I spoke quietly.

What I said does not really matter. Sysonsby laughed at it. He has no respect for a chap's feelings, and he foolishly proposed a wager that Rollins was really up to the stupid business of buying me as a husband for his daughter.

I refused it at all events; said it was tommyrot and that, in any case, I would not marry the girl if she were as fascinating as Cleopatra and as rich as the Bank of England.

And Sysonsby laughed again — a beastly, knowing laugh—as if he had more grounds for his idiotic theories than mere imagination.

"All right, old chap," he said, sipping his whisky and soda and looking queerly at me over the top of the glass. "Have it your own way. But I should advise you to find out what Rollins is after—if it isn't your coronet.

"He evidently means to shut the gates of Didderington Park and the doors of Didderington Manor in your face one of these days. Look him up, old man.

"She may not be as fascinating as Cleopatra nor as rich as the Bank of England—but a name like yours must give some discount. I'm going to get shaved. I believe the Randania sails on Saturday."

I said in the beginning that Sysonsby was an idiot, and I still thought so when, the following Saturday, from the Randania's upper promenade-deck I watched Holyhead vanish into thin blue haze.

CHAPTER II.

SYSONSBY'S FRIEND.

EVERY one has been seized with a few foolish impulses. Sailing upon the Randania was one of mine, but I was really never more serious in my life.

Somehow or other, I could not get Sysonsby's idea out of my head. Perhaps you know how it is?

The germ of a remote possibility bothers you. You laugh at it at first—not very sincerely — but the thing sticks; and the more you think of it the bigger and more bothersome it grows, until you admit it quite probable. Then you lie awake at night, and before morning you are quite sure there is no mistake about it.

I spent two quite interesting days and nights — hardly slept a wink — thought like the dickens — and rose upon Friday morning very much determined to leave my bally coronet in the

dust-bin until I could pick it out and clean it myself.

That forenoon I called upon my lawyers, told them to look after my rents and so forth—to sack everybody at Didderington Park but the housekeeper, a maid, and the gardener, who had a wife and a fine little chap they were foolish enough to give my name to; and, further, the lawyers were to give me one thousand pounds — if I were worth that much.

They said I could have eleven hundred if I wanted all the cash that was legally mine; but I stuck to my plan and took the thousand, determined to make it ten in six months or go to the wall.

I disliked that man Rollins intensely, more particularly since I could learn nothing of him in London; and I also entertained an antipathy toward the "heiress daughter" of Sysonsby's story. But, as one will, I thought I'd rather like to see whether she was as ravishingly beautiful as she "novelettishly" ought to be.

That was possibly one reason why I booked a passage on the Randania—but the other two were much more important.

I wanted to learn, first hand if I could, more of the future owner of Didderington Manor and to sink my identity and my thousand where I believed the quickest results could be obtained, and thought it would be rich if Rollins should own the manor and most of the park, while I held the lodge and the gate with money I'd made right under his nose.

When I booked a berth under the name of John T. Mason and glanced at the passenger-list, I felt that the Earl of Didderington had given the chance of recognition the slip.

Yet, though there was no one on the Randania with whom I was even distantly acquainted, the majority of the passengers being Americans returning from summering in Europe—I held to my stateroom pretty religiously, bribing a steward to serve all my meals there, only going up on deck after dark.

The weather was ideal, and usually for an hour or two after dinner the decks were quite lively; then the crowd would thin out by twos and threes; careful mamas would trot frivolous daughters away from light flirtations in shadowy corners.

The piano in the music-room, that hammered "sugar-moons" and "Junes" and "spoons" out of its system for hours on end, would give one last wail in the form of "Auld Lang Syne" or "My Country, 'Tis of Thee"—"God Save the King" I call it—and join hands with its tormentors in silence; the chatter and the laughter would die away into the bowels of the ship, and the men, left to their own devices, would struggle with desultory, monotoned conversation for a little while until, one by one, their "good-night" cigars would go whirling overboard, and they would descend to their cabins.

In the smoke-room, of course, men sat late, idling with chance and their refreshments till the deck steward respectfully intimated his intention to put out the lights.

Upon the third night out, when almost every one else had gone to bed, I was strolling up and down the deck, trying to appreciate the moon and the rather pretty effect upon the water.

Some chaps—I don't mean poets—go into ecstacies over that sort of thing. I can't. It probably goes a little too deep for me—that is, I don't care to say too much about it.

I had the deck to myself, though there were still sounds of hilarity emanating from the smoke-room.

Away to starboard I saw what I at first presumed was a particularly large and restless star. Halting and leaning over the rail, I discovered the star to be the headlight of a tramp or something of the kind, and for a few minutes the bobbing light interested me.

I wondered what she carried, where she had come from, whither she was

bound? To suit my fancy, she was a tramp — black and storm-beaten, with a rugged, bearded skipper on the bridge, guiding her on her wallowing course from Hamburg to Honolulu.

She had anchored in the shadow of Table Mountain, stuck her nose into the shifting Niger mud, became ice-bound at Archangel, and run foul of a pirate junk off Hong-Kong.

According to my arrangement of her movements, she was plowing through the treacherous, heaving Bay of Biscay, bound for Tangiers.

"The Earl of Didderington is not a believer in the old adage of early to bed and early to rise?"

The voice was deep and low, and as I turned my head sharply I saw that the owner of it was quite worthy. His face was not quite distant at first, but there was no mistaking his size.

He was huge — dwarfed me completely in height, breadth, and personality. One felt the last first and at once, even in the dark—as if one were standing in a presence and was instantly awed thereby.

I was startled, of course. Never having seen the man before, I was at a loss to know how he knew my name, and as I tried to peer under the broad-rimmed felt hat he wore a soft laugh escaped him.

"That is a waste of time," he told me quietly. "Will you walk, or do you prefer to watch that tramp peddling her way to the scrap-heap? It's all the same to me."

The authority in his tone nettled me for a bit. I gasped and stood still, wondering why I did it. Then I laughed—as best I could.

"You're a queer chap—very interesting, no doubt, and all that—but, you see, I don't know you. My name is Mason. Good night."

I intended to walk away and leave him there, but I didn't. A large finger halted me—just a finger; the hand it belonged to must have resembled a roast.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Mason," he said calmly. "Men who know me little call me Campbell. That will do for the present. Others who know me better have another name for me, but it canna be even whispered here. I am your friend. Is not that enough? Are ye a man or a cateran?"

I stayed and puzzled and looked blankly up at him, with that "canna" of his sticking in my ears. That word, apart from the name he had given me, fixed his nationality.

"Very well, Mr. Campbell, I'll return the compliment and say I am glad to make your acquaintance," I decided at last. "Let's go and sit down somewhere, farther away from the smoke-room. I'm interested, really, and if it's anything one-half as mysterious as you are, I'm selfish enough to want to keep it all to myself."

Without another word he piloted me into the shadow of a deck-house, where he distributed his huge bulk over a deck-chair, while I lit a cigar—offering him one, which he refused—and sat down beside him.

"I seldom smoke when I want to talk," he told me, and added: "You're a canny man—for a Didderington. They've generally been a feckless crew, and when a friend o' us both said you might sail on the Randania, I thought I'd sail wi' ye—tae keep ye oot o' mischief."

I sat up.

"Sysonsby!"

Campbell nodded, and, leaning back in his chair, unconsciously gave me a better view of his face.

It was broad and strong, clean-shaven, set with deep blue eyes that danced sometimes or remained dangerously steady at others, giving one due warning of what might happen if one was not very careful. The mouth opened and closed like a trap, and no one could, for a moment, mistake the compelling quality of his voice or underestimate the folly of antagonizing him.

"Mr. Sysonsby is the man!" he de-

clared quietly in reply to my exclamation. "He did me a service once in Paris and we exchanged cards. Whenever I am in London I look him up. This time he told me about you, and—"

"The deuce he did!" I exclaimed, and wished Sysonsby were within arm's length of me.

"Dinna swear. No man ever got anywhere of consequence by the use o' profane language, and there's one of those smoke-room fools who's been drinking more than his head can stand, glowerin' at us like a sheep."

As I turned my head the "smoke-room fool" in question lurched across the deck toward the rail and hung over it limply. I moved with the intention of helping him to a chair, but again Campbell stayed me with a finger.

"Mind your own business. The man's all right, and that's the deck-steward's work. But I like the spirit o' charity in ye. That's no' a Didderington trait. Sysonsby said ye were a good sort, and mebbe you're no' so saft as ye look."

His great hand suddenly seized my arm, crushing my biceps till I almost yelped.

"Um—it might be worse," he admitted, while I looked somewhat blankly at him and felt his proprietary attitude creeping over me.

"Who—who the dickens are you?" I asked at last desperately. "And what did Sysonsby tell you? You talk as if you'd known me all my life, and I've never set eyes on you before. I know you're Scotch, of course—"

"And there ye're wrang," he interrupted softly, and continuing, his voice instantly altered, without a trace of Scotch in it: "I am an American of New York, five generations removed from Aberfoyle, where my forefathers were kings of men. I was born a stone's throw from Fifth Avenue, and was educated at Harvard.

"My father's name was one to conjure with in Wall Street, and mine has been coupled in rumor with almost every débutante that has been thrown upon the Four Hundred's matrimonial market since I slipped into my father's shoes.

"I have been invited to run for a seat in Congress, and the Mayor of New York has several times declared that I was one of the city's most distinguished citizens."

A chuckle of enjoyment came from the depths of his great chest.

"These are my credentials, and I've given you the name of a friend of us both—and maybe you've heard of a man named Rollins?"

Heard of him? Good Heaven—the man owned me!

"Yes—yes—do you know the beggar?" I admitted and asked hurriedly.

"There's young Van Huysen being carried off to his bed," Campbell declared with most irritating irrelevancy, referring to the smoke-room fool who was led toward the companionway by the deck-steward.

"He'll be twenty-one next March, and will burn enough money any day of his life thereafter to keep ten able-bodied, useful humans for a year. The Lord didn't mean that to happen when the world was first thought of!"

"No—no—of course not," I agreed at once. "But this Rollins chap—"

"Is a nasty man to look to for sympathy," Campbell interrupted absently, watching the young man vanish down the companion. "He wastes it all on that young skate I've been telling you about—young Van Huysen is his nephew, you know. Rollins's daughter and he are engaged to be married—next year."

For some unearthly reason I was disappointed.

Campbell looked dreamily out across the water, and for a moment or two there was silence.

"Rollins has made money, and he keeps it," he continued in a low tone, still looking straight ahead. "That man would not give ten cents to a Salvation Army Christmas dinner. But he will—he will!"

He turned toward me quickly.

"Mark me, Didderington, I say he will! Not ten cents, either—no—not ten cents!"

"But — what the dickens—" I began blankly, and he suddenly leaned forward and laid his hand on my arm.

"You know where you stand?" he questioned hurriedly in a low tone, and his voice changed instantly. "I need not remind you of your condition—and you are going to New York where a life can be bought for a meal?

"You're a nuisance in the eyes of some people, I know; but I can offer you my assistance, which better men than you have accepted before this, and, nae doot, will accept again. I am a man wha bothers little wi' the law. The law is for them that need it to hide behind and evade their honest obligations.

"If ye tak' up wi' me I can help ye and put ye back where your fathers were; but ye must be prepared for things ye never thought of, and to help me when your turn comes. I give nothing for nothing — not even to a starving man.

"When he is fed and able to stand and use his hand or his head, he must work and do my bidding. And I'll no' turn any man's toes doon the wrang road.

"That's my proposal. I'll help you if you'll help me, and if ye'd like to meet the man Rollins, be at my club next Thursday at ten in the morning."

He rose very suddenly, thrusting a card into my hand.

"But, hang it all!" I protested, gaping.

"*Wheesht!* "No' a word o' this to a soul. Men who bargain wi' me don't, as a rule, ask questions. I tell them a' I think they ought to ken—an' nae mair.

"On this ship we don't know each other — understand? Keep to your night-owl practises. That's best for us all—at present. Gude nicht, Mr. Mason, I'll be at the club next Thursday at 10 A.M. sharp."

He turned his huge frame about, and in a moment more was swinging from my sight down the saloon companion, leaving me to stare after him, wondering which of us was the greater fool.

Then, as several of the smoking-room *habitués* came on deck, I realized that in my isolation I was making myself conspicuous, and immediately descended to my cabin where, switching on the light, I glanced at the card Campbell had given me.

It had a curious border of small red and black squares, and upon it was printed:

FOR CHARITY

CHAPTER III.

THE YONKERS AFFAIR.

BEFORE we reached New York I hanged Sysonsby quite frequently for discussing my affairs with strangers.

But hanging him did not alter matters a bit, and Campbell's mysterious manner, his apparent knowledge of Rollins, his blind proposal, and the Scottish dialect he, as an American, so curiously affected, kept me constantly deciding and reversing my decision to accept his offer of assistance.

The chap interested me. He was a new experience, and his claim that he could put me back "where my fathers had been," though bombastic, was at least in keeping with my ideas. What he expected of me in return I could not fathom.

I looked at the card he had given me a hundred times a day, and it was not easy to curb my curiosity upon the several matters that were then of importance, but though I went up on deck every evening, hopeful that he would renew our conversation, I learned no more of him on the Randania.

I saw him several times, and am quite sure that he always saw me, but there was nothing in his expression to suggest it. His principal interest appeared to be the entertainment of two young ladies and a distinguished-looking matron, whom I presumed was their mother.

A young man, resembling the "young Van Huysen" who had been put to bed by the deck-steward, sometimes hovered in the background, giving most of his attention to the younger girl, who was also the prettier of the two.

Campbell appeared to share himself equally among them all, and though he was probably upon the sunny side of thirty-five, he acted as a sort of *pater familias,* with the apparent approval of the matron, who might have been his sister — or the sister of his mother. She was that sort of woman with her age so carefully concealed that one might err twenty years.

I could not study any of them very well there, however, nor amid the horrible bustle and excitement on the pier at New York, which the ship news reporters tell you about every day; and while I was having a dickens of a time with a customs officer, who must have suspected that I was not very respectable, Campbell and the others vanished in the crush.

When the customs chap had quite finished ferreting through my baggage and seemed disappointed that my declaration had been a truthful one, I bought a taxi and drove to a very quiet, middle-class hotel in Fifty-Fifth Street. I say "bought" advisedly, as I might have had a London taxi for a week for what that chauffeur said the taximeter charged me for about fifteen minutes.

Signing the hotel register as Mason, I secured two rooms with a bath, and immediately settled down to the business of playing valet to myself, and of making myself comfortable for at least six months.

Of course, I know now that I began all wrong.

I should have forgotten everything I'd ever been—sold my "topper" and my English-made clothes, taken a three-dollar-a-week room somewhere in the "Nineties," lived on fifty cents a day, denying myself cigars and other kindred trifles, and I should have bought up several bootblack stands or dabbled in margins till my five thousand dollars had become fifty thousand or had vanished altogether.

Or, I should have brought my coronet with me, taken a suite of rooms at the most expensive hotel I could find, worn the coronet all day, everywhere, and hired myself out to advertise somebody's breakfast food or soap at ten thousand a day, expenses paid. Every newspaper in the country would have given the thing a column—particularly if I furnished the story that went with it.

Then I might have—

But there are innumerable things I might have done.

Instead, I practically sat down in a middle-rate hotel, which means nothing of importance to any one, waiting for Thursday morning, which was four days away.

Campbell's offer of assistance had stifled my initiative—such as it was—and I'm afraid I leaned upon him more than I had any right to do, considering that I knew nothing about the man.

That leaning habit is fatal, and it is so easy to acquire sometimes. If one feels that there is some one handy to stand the racket, one is inclined to slither away one's time, fiddling with this and that and arriving nowhere.

In the interval I received several impressions of New York that are hardly worth bothering about in the light of what came after.

There was the toast at the hotel which produced indigestion and immediately explained why the clerk chewed gum; the ragtime that followed me everywhere; the dizzy height of the sky-scrapers; the "don't care a hang" attitude of the lift-boys; the glare of Broadway at night, and a Mardi Gras

crush at Coney Island, into which I was brutally inveigled by a traveling salesman, whom I met at the hotel and whom I lost, together with my hat, my hearing, and my dignity somewhere amid the confetti and the noise and the seething mob on Surf Avenue.

I never saw the salesman again.

There was also a colonel from one of the Carolinas, who helped me toward an understanding of the why and wherefore of the South's defeat. That I went to sleep in the middle of it did not matter. He woke me up and began all over again.

However, Thursday morning came at last, and I remember whistling the "British Grenadiers" while I tubbed.

The waiter at breakfast eyed me suspiciously, because I smiled and did not ask him to take back the toast.

But a head-line on the front page of my morning paper, and the news-matter that filled half the column below it, removed my cheerfulness slowly. It read:

ROB ROY GANG PAYS ANOTHER CALL.

CARD LEFT WITH J. F. BERMAN OF YONKERS.

$5,000 in Cash and Jewels Gone. No Explosives or Drills Used to Open Safe. Yonkers Police Fail to Find Trace of Thieves.

It appeared that Mr. Berman's house had been entered the previous evening, and the safe, containing money and most of the family jewels, had been opened and ransacked.

In the card-tray in the hall there was found a card with a border of red and black squares, bearing the words:

FOR CHARITY

For a little while I stared at the type with my mouth open, and at first I think I barely understood just what it meant.

"Campbell a—"

I didn't say it—hardly dared to think it.

It seemed too ridiculous to be given a second thought. Yet I gave it a third and a fourth and a fifth and became more and more uncomfortable.

The newspaper expressed small sympathy for Mr. Berman, and I thought the account of the matter was written in a rather facetious vein, vaguely suggesting between the lines that the loss sustained by the burglarized and apparently very frantic gentleman represented about all he had ever subscribed—"for charity."

Quite evidently, too, the Rob Roy Gang was a clever and renowned aggregation. Their depredations had created amusement for the masses, roused the anger of their victims, and demanded the respect of the police—the latter seeming to be unable to solve the mystery of the gang's existence and organization and identity.

With something akin to awe, and feeling sure that every one was watching me, I left the breakfast-table, sneaked up to my room, and, finding the card Campbell had given me, tore it up into very small pieces and burned them in an ash-tray.

Then I breathed more freely and looked forward to meeting Campbell with an entirely new interest. For the world I would not have missed my appointment with this American "five generations removed from Aberfoyle," where his forefathers had been "kings of men."

Might it be that he was a descendant of the robber-chieftain of the MacGregors, made famous by Sir Walter Scott. His build, and his truly strange use of the Scottish tongue, lent color to the surmise, hinting, at the same time, that he might be somewhat of a fanatic about his ancestors.

My anxiety to become acquainted with Rollins was shoved into the background, and as I went out I was so keen to talk to some one about it that I said to the clerk, as I handed him my key:

"That Rob Roy Gang is quite an interesting company of thieves?"

The clerk smiled in a superior manner, hung my key upon the proper hook, and, coming back to me, declared in admiration:

"They're the slickest bunch in New York when they get goin'. You'll find them workin' Westchester to-night, Montclair to-morrow, and Fifth Avenue the week after that. Any gezink they've got their mark on might as well cough up and save trouble."

"Jove! Do you know how they came to acquire their name?"

"Sure. Some newspaperman figured out that the red and black squares on the cards they leave behind when they clean out a guy was the Rob Roy tartan — you know — the stuff the Scotchies make kilts outa."

"I see."

And I imagined, as I left the hotel to keep my appointment at Campbell's club, that the police of New York would have paid handsomely for my vision.

CHAPTER IV.

ROLLINS.

I HAVE purposely refrained from giving the name of the club in which I met Campbell that morning. It is very select—a sort of American edition of the Marlborough, minus the awful silence that hangs over the latter, with a perpetual funereal effect. Membership in it constitutes the last word upon the question of a man's right to be acknowledged as being perfectly respectable, financially, socially, and morally.

Campbell had breakfasted there. He came out of the dining-room as I entered the reception-hall; and the cucumber can't be compared with him. It is cool in a chilly way, whereas Campbell's calm wasn't in the least obvious. It was so complete, so natural and easy, one did not notice it at all.

The sight of him made it still more difficult to believe what I suspected. It was incongruous, inexplicable, and I was sure I should wake up presently.

But even his generous crop of dark red hair seemed to substantiate the evidence I had against him. All he needed, I thought, was a beard of a similar hue. The picture of Scott's hero and the cattle-thief ancestor he claimed for his own would then be complete.

His height and breadth seemed to lose some of their hugeness in the daylight, but he was still massive; and though his mouth and eyes and jaw all gave evidence of power of another order there was a wealth of sympathy and fellowship in his face.

He greeted me with a smile and a "Good morning" that came rumbling from the depths of him, and his handshake was something to remember.

It was I who was embarrassed and afraid as we met, and I who quaked as we entered the smoking-room and walked across the floor in the teeth of the few members in the room at that hour. But it was instantly apparent that my companion was a man of worth in clubdom. Almost every one in the place greeted him with the easy familiarity of old friends, and the studied "Good morning, sir," of men just sufficiently acquainted to be conscious of one another's worth.

As we passed a white-haired old gentleman he put his paper down and looked over the top of his glasses at Campbell, who saluted him sonorously.

"Good morning, judge."

"Good morning, Robert. Have you a minute?"

Asking my pardon and indicating where we would sit Campbell talked to the judge for a little while; and I watched him, pondering the irony of it.

He appeared to be in a very good humor that morning, and though, when he rejoined me, he talked of nothing in particular, I listened very attentively in spite of the hundred and one things crowding upon my mind; and, of course, I could hardly throw the Rob Roy Gang at his head in his own club.

Still rattling on in the same key, which was not loud enough to be heard by any one else, and with no hint of the Scotch accent, he said lightly:

"Judge Farquhar claims it will be two months to-morrow since I dined with him. His wife is a motherly soul, and adds an inch to my stature every time I call. So, you see, I really am quite respectable—up here. Rollins is just five minutes late, as usual."

His glance went idly past me toward the door, and, sharply turning my head, I saw a lean-faced, clean-shaven man of medium height standing in the doorway, looking swiftly about him and nodding to several of the men, who, rather bruskly, I thought, took note of his arrival.

As his eyes lighted upon Campbell and me, he came toward us with short, snappy steps and an apology forming on his tongue. Campbell rose and I followed suit, feeling a little chilly.

Rollins is the only reason I can give for the sensation.

Instantly I knew that he was small and probably mean. Some men have their character written upon them so plainly one can't make a mistake.

Yet Rollins's face was not a bad one. The lines were good. There was something of aristocracy in it—the aquiline nose and the broad forehead. The eyes and mouth, however, were a different combination—the latter was weak—the sort that lies easily; the former, shifty, with a hint of cruelty.

He was sparely built and wore his clothes without ostentation — everything but his tie. It was a hideous thing, out of all harmony with the rest of him; and the only solution I have to offer for a man of his station wearing such atrocities is—that he must have been color-blind, and would not admit it to his valet.

His hair was tinged with gray, and there was a small round bald spot on the top of his head, but his carefully preserved countenance did not say that he was, as I learned later, within an ace of half a century.

At once, without any hesitation, I disliked him, apart from the fact that I hated to think of him owning Didderington; and was quite sure, then and there, that I was not going to like his daughter any better—if ever we were introduced.

"Sorry if I've kept you waiting," he began hurriedly, and I did not like the way his eyes skipped from place to place, as if he were afraid to look straight at me.

I noted that Campbell and he did not shake hands, and for a moment or two, as I did not know how I was to be introduced, I felt horribly uncertain of where I stood.

"Mr. Mason, permit me to introduce you to Mr. Rollins, the most confirmed American-Englishman in the States."

There was little humor in Campbell's deep tones, but I smiled and murmured the usual lie about being very glad, and so forth. I felt the pressure of Rollins's long, bony fingers about my own.

Sometimes, lying awake at night, I feel that handshake and shiver.

We sat down again, and when Campbell had ordered drinks we talked—or, at least, Campbell did—and I learned, before I had a chance to say anything on the matter, that I was a close friend of a man named Sysonsby, who had done him a service of some sort in Paris; and, apparently, he had promised Sysonsby to make my short stay of a few weeks in New York as interesting as possible.

All that—with no hesitancy whatever.

Rollins accepted the explanation without a question, and if I showed the effect of the prevarication in my face, it did not seem to matter.

"Unfortunately, as I was just saying before Mr. Rollins came in," Campbell continued, seeming very apologetic, and, curiously enough, ignoring Rollins altogether, "I will require to go out of town a great deal in the next few weeks, but Mr. Rollins"—bowing toward that gentleman, yet looking past

him—" who really knows how to entertain an Englishman "—bowing toward me and smiling—" very kindly offered yesterday afternoon, when I told him of my plight, to give you a less lazy impression of New York than I would."

" Really that is—er—awfully good of you, but—" I stammeringly began in protest.

" No, no, no—not at all," Rollins interrupted in that suave, quick way he had. " Mr. Campbell's friends are mine, and to prove it we shall all take dinner at Mrs. Van Huysen's this evening, where you shall meet the whole family and be made thoroughly at home before Campbell leaves town. Mrs. Van Huysen is my sister, you know, and since my wife died my daughter and I, like poor relations, almost live there."

He laughed and I tried to—Campbell refused to bother lying about his sensations. But he seemed to be waiting for my reply.

I could not think of an excuse quickly enough, and then, being reminded of the opportunity to meet Sysonsby's " novelettishly beautiful " heroine, I thought I might as well see her.

" Thanks. I shall be very glad."

Campbell rose so abruptly that I was startled.

" Now—if you will pardon me rushing off like this I am sure I can leave you feeling certain that Mr. Rollins will take good care of you. I have an appointment down-town at eleven and must hurry. But I shall see you again this evening."

While I struggled to say something appropriate he had seized my hand and was gone, with just a nod for Rollins, who sat still and said:

" All right, old man—I'll look after him."

The whole thing happened so quickly I didn't have time to form an opinion, but I watched with mixed sensations the big man's red-topped head go out of the door, while Rollins, who did not seem to mind the fact that I was not listening to him, instantly began to talk of a naval review he had seen at Spithead.

That was only the beginning. He talked of the " green of Devon," of " British brawn," of England's wars, of her Colonies, of everything English under the sun.

The chap was England-mad. He even grew sentimental about it, and when an American becomes wishy-washy about England he is not to be trusted.

It did not seem to bother him in the least that I paid little or no attention to what he said. But then he did not look straight at me for two consecutive seconds in the two hours we sat there; nor while at lunch, which I ate at his expense.

I was too busy trying to imagine where Campbell was leading me to, and as I watched Rollins fiddle with the cheese while he talked of Henley regatta I tried to picture him putting me out of Didderington Manor — and couldn't.

The picture would not form.

He said, as he signed the card, that he would show me New York as he knew it—but I was almost sure to be disappointed.

" Why, even our slums haven't existed long enough to be interesting. They have no history, and who wants to bother with filth alone? But we'll go down to Chinatown some evening, and then possibly to a place I know, in a supposedly dangerous section, called ' Hell's Kitchen.'

" The name is much more lurid than the district. Lots of people say it's worse than Whitechapel—but that's rubbish. At any rate, you shall see it for yourself and draw your own conclusions."

I looked across the table at him and found his eyes elsewhere.

Yet I said I should be glad to, and on the way to my hotel tried to explain why I had been so foolish and why Rollins had seemed so pleased.

Knowing what I did of Whitechapel,

he was among the last men in the world with whom I should venture into anything resembling it.

CHAPTER V.

A DISAPPOINTING EVENING.

THE Van Huysen residence was on ——th Street, a few doors east of Fifth Avenue—which is to say, that it was among the élite of New York's private dwellings.

It was not a pretentious-looking place, and its interior leaned more toward the cozy than the esthetic.

I can't describe house-furnishings. When I enter a room I take the furniture for granted. Sometimes, if I've been there more than once, I learn that a particular chair is more comfortable than the others, but I do not mentally catalogue the hangings and bric-à-brac, or make any fine distinctions between the Heppelwhite, Sheraton or modern designs in the tables and chairs and the rest of the usual things with which people fill their houses.

The moment I entered the Van Huysen establishment I was conscious of a homelike warmth. For one thing, I was not confronted with the rather prevalent Westminster Abbey Poets' Corner effect in the hall—the only evidence of hero-worship being a bust of Goethe upon a pedestal in an out-of-the-way corner made by the curve of the staircase, where the dead-white of the great Teuton's Parian marble countenance was subdued by shadows.

Even the bronze female figure crouching in the center of a circular fountain spray looked comfortable, and the English butler, with his nationality written clearly upon him, made me feel still more at home—that is—for a second.

Then he walked a step or two and—limped.

Every one will admit that a limping butler is a novelty. That fellow's right heel appeared to trail behind after the rest of him had gone on, and all through dinner I tried to remember where the deuce I had seen a butler limp just like that before!

It wasn't a bit of use. I could not place the chap at all, but I had a disagreeable suspicion that he had recognized me.

His face did not indicate that he had, but that was the sort of butler he was. I imagined he would report the arrival of the millennium in the same dead tones in which he announced "Mr. Mason."

He spoiled my dinner, and the Rollins-Van Huysen families unconsciously assisted him. With Rollins added, they were the group I had seen on the Randania.

Mrs. Van Huysen was a charming woman, and her daughter Alice was a reproduction of the mother—almost line for line, gesture for gesture.

The girl's gray eyes held the same quiet, purposeful expression in them, with the same hint of humor lurking behind it, and the mouth and chin showed the same quality of determination, without appearing in the least hard or unsympathetic.

Her brother Ralph was her antithesis, being neither quiet nor purposeful nor humorous. His mouth and chin were weak, like Rollins's, and his eyes had a silly sort of habit of traveling ceilingward while he talked.

Slightly under seventy inches, I judged by his flabby, anemic appearance that he did not care much for athletics.

Campbell told me afterward that he had been "sent down" from Harvard for something or other which wasn't made public. I felt sorry for him—at the same time I thought I would rather enjoy taking him into the "gym" and hammering a little life into him.

But Miss Rollins—and here you are possibly going to be disappointed—was still more lifeless.

I think I have previously said that she was prettier than her cousin Alice—but I'm afraid I can't describe her as she appeared to me that night with-

out referring to her lack-luster expression, as if she had not a particle of interest in life but the wearing of pretty clothes and the preserving of a truly wonderful complexion.

Her dull gold hair, arranged in a carefully careless fashion, detracted nothing from the girlishness of her small oval face. The eyebrows were several shades darker than the hair, and her eyes, so deep a brown as to be almost black, would have been most attractive and appealing if they had not been so devoid of activity.

But there was an indefinable something in them at times that made me wonder if the lackadaisical attitude was not a clever affectation. I imagined that Miss Margaret Rollins would have given several years of her young life to get up from that table and run—anywhere away from it.

She made only a pretense of eating, and when I caught her looking at me through some flowers that obscured a perfect view, I had an impression that for some reason or other she was weighing me in the balance, and was fearful of being detected in it, not by me so much as by some of the others.

Not once did she speak all the while we sat at table.

It was rather a nervous affair for me, and I'm afraid I was stupid in some of my remarks, but Campbell carried the burden of protecting me from danger-line subjects, such as the trip over and the people my hostess thought we both might know; and Rollins, peculiarly enough, seemed anxious to assist him.

Campbell laughed the voyage away with a joke at my expense. He admitted that I had been on board the Randania and that he had known of it, but I was such a wretched sailor I hadn't left my cabin, and had begged to be excused from meeting any one until I'd got ashore.

Appearing not to take any heed of Miss Rollins's rather sneaking scrutiny, but to listen very attentively to something her father was saying about being disturbed on board ship only when the screw got out of the water, I had a peculiar notion that his daughter did not believe Campbell's story about me.

I could not understand that girl. One moment she was bright with even a suggestion of deviltry and shrewdness hiding behind the screen her doll-like beauty made; then she would cast a sidelong questioning glance toward her father, as if she were afraid he might be watching her, and the mask of lethargic indifference would fall again.

Campbell's personality, of course, dominated the whole table, but I could not help thinking that Alice was just a little too transparent in her efforts to avoid such remarks as he directed to her.

I had a strange jumble of impressions that night, and later, when we joined the ladies in the drawing-room, I received a few more.

Rollins and I—because Rollins seemed afraid to leave me for a moment—entertained (?) Mrs. Van Huysen with a list of places which he thought would be of interest to an Englishman.

Out of the corner of my eye I watched Ralph inveigle his cousin—and *fiancée*—out of the room to where I surmised the conservatory ought to be.

Upon a settee, just far enough distant to prevent what they said being heard, Campbell and Alice also conversed in low tones; and, judging by the girl's attitude, I felt that their conversation would make interesting reading.

She was leaning away from him, as if she were not very anxious to hear what he was saying, and because she had to listen, tried to assume an air of careless unconcern not altogether successful since I, whose perspicacity isn't anything to make a fuss about, could see that she was not finding Campbell's remarks very pleasant.

Just as I threatened to become rude in my lack of attention to her mother, Alice rose abruptly and came toward us.

Campbell did not follow her. Getting leisurely upon his feet and walking toward the portièred entrance of another room, he announced *basso profundo,* so that we all turned our heads:

"I am going to have some music to soothe my savage soul. When the pain becomes too intense let me know."

Parting and throwing back the hangings, revealing the music-room bathed in subdued light, Campbell twirled the seat of the stool before a grand piano low enough to suit him, and instantly roused the instrument into the activity of a popular waltz.

Mrs. Van Huysen smiled in motherly approval, glanced questioningly up into her daughter's face, and—as I did—found it a little pale.

Rollins was saying something or other about the opera, but I did not hear it very clearly. I was trying to do too many things at once—to be attentive to my hostess, to explain the tightening of Alice's lips and the manner in which she avoided her mother's silent interrogation—and to realize that the man at the piano, the respected club-member and the much-admired, much-at-home representative of a great city's most select circle was connected in some way with the active management of a clever and notorious company of thieves.

It was truly unbelievable.

Then he sang. He had a remarkable voice, and, unlike most amateurs, knew how to use it.

But Alice did not seem to care for it very much. Murmuring an apology, she left the room just as Ralph and Margaret came trailing in again to clump down upon the settee Campbell and Alice had vacated; and for the remainder of the evening the "children" showed little signs of animation.

Altogether they were a curious group of people.

Had I been actually in search of romance, which of course I wasn't, that somewhat aimless evening would surely have suggested to me the advisability of looking elsewhere or of taking the first steamer home again; particularly in view of the fact that the lady in Sysonsby's "novel" did not come up to the specifications.

She was "ravishingly beautiful" enough—no doubt about that—but I left the house feeling that I had been imposed upon all around.

I declined Rollins's offer to drive me to my hotel, saying I would rather walk since the night was so fine.

Campbell went off in a hurry—to catch a train for somewhere. So I set out alone, digging my hands into my overcoat-pockets, trying to gage the extent of my disappointment and the importance of the limping butler.

And my right hand got hold of a letter—a letter that hadn't been there when I went to the Van Huysens'!

I pulled the thing out under the light of the first lamp-post and read the superscription upon a fairly good business envelope.

This is it:

To the Earl of Didderington,
New York.

CHAPTER VI.

AT GRANT'S TOMB.

I KNEW it was from the butler.

My first thought was that he had not dallied in letting me know that I was "discovered"; and then I felt rather indignant with him for his confounded impertinence in taking liberties with my coat-pockets.

I did not open the letter, however, until I reached my rooms. But I did not saunter, as I had intended. Perspiring uncomfortably, and with the door of my sitting-room carefully locked, I glanced at the superscription again, slit the envelope, and, pulling forth a half sheet of cream-colored note-paper, read:

> At Grant's Tomb Saturday night at nine. Taxi. Don't fail.

That was all—not even an initial attached to it. The writing, firm and

bold, was unquestionably masculine, but the construction of the invitation struck me as being somewhat peculiar —for a butler. Either the gentleman with the limp was an impudent beggar or I was guessing wrong.

I lay awake most of the night puzzling over the matter, and it is sufficient to say that I arrived nowhere—not even in a continued effort to remember where I had seen the butler before.

The man's face was not at all familiar—just his rather odd limp. I awoke next morning still in the dark about him and in a wretched humor.

There was no music in my soul while I tubbed that morning.

Sysonsby's dream had gone to the dickens; Campbell was too uncertain a quantity to rely upon, and his peculiar action in tying me to Rollins's coat-tails irritated me. I detested mystery.

The police, according to that morning's paper, were quite at sea regarding the Berman robbery, and New York was told by Yonkers to keep its gangsters to itself. Some people wrote letters about it; indignant, amusing, critical. But they didn't teach me anything.

Rollins was to call for me in his car at ten, and I would have enjoyed sending down word that I was not at home had it not been for the fact that I had nothing better to do and thought I might as well suffer him for a day or two just to see if anything worth while would happen.

His intention for that morning was to have me compare the Metropolitan Museum with the National Gallery.

I did not know whether we had anything resembling Grant's Tomb or not, but as I dressed I made up my mind that our itinerary for that day should embrace it. To me, at that stage of my acquaintance with New York, a tomb sounded rather funereal as a rendezvous, and I thought I would like to look it and its surroundings over in the daylight before I should decide whether or not to accept the anonymous invitation.

When Rollins called I thought he was disgustingly pleasant. He gushed, and a woman who does that is bad enough. I insinuated that I would like to see Grant's Tomb, and he declared at once that my suggestion was splendid, and added:

"Riverside Drive has been compared favorably by a few as being the equal of if not an improvement upon the Embankment; but"—with a smile that pitied the critics referred to—"of course we know better, just as we know that cricket is a much more gentlemanly game than baseball."

I did not know anything about it then—baseball, I mean—and I have always been very fond of cricket, so I did not argue the point.

I had the good fortune, however, to see a World's Series game last year, and Jove! it was a scorcher! In the seventh inning the—but I mustn't do that sort of thing. I am not a baseball reporter; and since you can read a guide-book of New York anywhere, at any time, you will please take the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *et cetera, et cetera,* for granted.

Rollins clung to me like a leech, hustling me about for all the world like a Cook's tourist, till I had given up hope of being able to get rid of him, so that I might have a chance to satisfy myself upon the authorship of the mysterious note.

About six-thirty on Saturday evening, seated in his car, we were crossing the East River in a ferryboat to Thirty-Fourth Street on our return from some aviation trials at Mineola, Long Island.

Rollins had lapsed into silence, and as I was considering how I could tell him that I should like very much to be alone that evening, he surprised me by becoming suddenly apologetic—because he found it impossible to dine with me!

"I got a telegram this morning,"

he explained, " from a very old business friend of mine. We became members of the Stock Exchange about the same time, and many of our interests have been affiliated ever since. He is coming in from the West tonight—probably is at his hotel now, and though I've been trying to think up an excuse all day, I'm afraid I can't get out of it. I'm awfully sorry—"

" Oh, that's all right," I assured him. " No doubt I'll manage to amuse myself in some way."

So we both laughed, and lied our way to freedom from each other for one evening; Rollins evidently as secretly anxious as I. The " old friend from the West " story sounded so very much like the " friend just home from India," that I was extremely skeptical about it; but I was not satisfied that everything was to be all right until he dropped me at my hotel and left me there.

Then I felt at liberty to turn my thoughts without restraint toward Grant's Tomb.

I would have liked very much to have been able to discuss the thing with Campbell, and was not at all sure, when I started out at quarter past eight, that I would actually meet the butler. The fellow was not so dreadfully important so far as I could see; but, of course, I wanted to be on the spot to confirm my surmise that he had really written the note.

Grant's Tomb, as every American knows, is situated upon the loftiest rise of Riverside Park, overlooking the Hudson River. Sightseeing cars or a Fifth Avenue bus will take you there, and you will find that the magnificent resting-place for a magnificent man occupies the center of a generous space; and possibly your bus may not go any farther, but will sweep round the broad driveway encircling the tomb and go off down-town again.

The taxi referred to in the note would necessarily require to do the same thing; that is, approach the tomb from down-town upon the driveway on the right, and make the circle to return.

There is a constant stream of cars passing to and fro, and not a little pedestrian traffic, if the evening is fine. The flare of electric lamps lights up the main drive, but beyond it there is plenty of shadow, and the seats strung along the sidewalk, close to the park rail, are usually occupied—two people upon each seat.

The Hudson, lapping the foot of the park's gentle slope, and dotted with the bobbing lights of miscellaneous craft, rolls on in broad majesty to the sea. Across the water the Jersey shore winks at fitful distances; and as I waited, watching for a taxi that would show signs of having the tomb for its destination, the searchlight from an Albany boat swept over the scene in a ghostly fashion.

Several of the people occupying seats in the shadows were startled into more decorous attitudes, and I caught sight of a taxi that had just trundled past, break from the common stream and turn to encircle the rendezvous.

I made no effort at concealment, and I had decided, on the run uptown, not to be bothered with any insolence or hints of blackmail, or anything in fact, but an explanation as to where I had seen that limp before. Then I would send the chap home with a little advice upon the value of silence, which he would preserve unless he wished to have his head punched.

Thus I was mentally and physically quite prepared for him when the taxi, with other eyes than mine upon it, drew into the curb.

Approaching it without hesitation I stood waiting for the butler to get out.

He did not get out; nor did the chauffeur leave his seat.

I began to think I had made a mistake and some audible, though not intelligible comment from the seats behind me hinted that I was making an ass of myself.

But I took a step nearer to make sure, and as I did so the occupant of the taxi leaned forward.

Margaret Rollins!

CHAPTER VII.

ARRANGING THINGS.

A MOVEMENT of her hand beckoned me to get into the taxi and to be quick about it.

It was no time or place for argument.

I obeyed.

The girl was alone; not in the least frightened or apologetic, and while I was vainly searching for something to say, she remarked as the cab moved out from the curb.

"Before we let the taximeter register any more miles against us perhaps I'd better be sure that you have enough money to pay for it!"

It is useless to attempt to explain how I felt. I was too limp and surprised to finely analyze sensations.

The Miss Rollins I had met a few evenings before had departed completely. By my side—too near me in fact to be quite fair to any man—sat a new creation.

She was beautiful and vivacious, and entirely self-possessed. Her eyes sparkled with the joy of life and freedom, and I knew that she was laughing at me quietly within.

"You see," she explained, "I didn't have time to bother about money. When I fainted at Aunt Alice's—"

"Fainted!"

"Yes; I faint beautifully, and Cousin Alice was sent home with me in their car. Papa has an apartment on Central Park West, not far from Mr. Campbell. Of course you know that papa is not at home to-night, don't you?"

"Er—yes—I believe he said something about getting a telegram from a friend this morning—"

A peculiarly bright smile interrupted me.

"Papa isn't always truthful. He fibs outrageously sometimes. He had a visit from that friend on Monday, and that's one reason why I'm here shocking you so very much. Please don't let's waste time discussing how unconventional this is. I'm tired of conventional things, anyway. You look as if you were afraid of me."

I was. But I sat up a little straighter and tried to refute the charge.

"No — I'm just a bit startled. It isn't right, you know, and you are so — er — so different. Altogether different. On Thursday you looked perfectly harmless. How did you penetrate my disguise?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Can't answer."

"Any other member of the family group guessed it?"

"Alice. She put that letter in your coat-pocket and helped me to faint and get away from her mother. After that the rest was easy, except that I haven't any money."

She seemed to doubt very much if I would have enough.

"I think I can manage that," I answered her. "Now, let's have the explanation."

"Yes, let's," she agreed, and stopped there expectantly.

"Well—er—that is—what is it?" I stammered when the pause was becoming awkward.

"Isn't that rather your affair than mine?"

"My—my affair?"

I met the quiet, interrogative look she gave me blankly.

"Why—yes. I have seen and approve of you, and I know you're not one-half as stupid as you are trying to appear. So please get the proposal over and done with, and then we'll talk business. Don't get down on your knees, though. The floor's dirty."

We were still somewhere on Riverside Drive, but mentally I was in pitch-darkness, gasping for air.

"Pro-posal!"

She laughed at me openly now.

"Don't be frightened. There is nothing very dreadful in asking me to marry you, is there? I don't bite or scratch, and I won't say no; and if we don't live happily ever after it will be your fault. Now—go ahead."

The fog cleared suddenly, and I joined her in her laughter.

"Oh, yes, of course I forgot! I came over here to be romantic. I didn't think the story was common property, though. But, anyway, what's the use? Cousin Ralph—"

"Doesn't count," the girl interrupted, almost sharply. "We won't discuss him at all, please. If he were worth discussion I wouldn't be here asking you to propose to me.

"You needn't say you love me or anything like that. Just ask me if I will marry you, and I'll say 'Yes'—and then we'll talk about papa and his friend."

"I—I see. But—I'm afraid I—er—don't catch your point of view. This is so sudden, as it were, and as I've never proposed to any one in my life before, I—"

Her fingers suddenly gripped my coat-sleeve.

"You haven't?"

There was a sort of hungry eagerness in her eyes and voice.

"Not once. What does a chap say, as a rule?"

Her scrutiny became much keener, and she seemed afraid that she would find in my face the hint of a lie.

"Then—will you—please—marry me?"

It was barely a whisper. A soft flush spread over her cheeks, but her eyes did not waver. I felt rather queer, as if we had gone deeper than was intended; and for a moment or two I just looked steadily down at her, wondering how seriously I was supposed to take her.

"Is that by way of instruction or—"

"Will you?"

Her fingers slid from my sleeve to my hand, and the grip of them was not to be ridiculed.

"Let me say it?" I suggested slowly, and her expression instantly became less strained. "Do you want—to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because if I don't marry you I'll have to marry Ralph — and I prefer you."

"Um—I see. And can't you refuse to marry Ralph?"

"Papa won't let me refuse. He arranged my marriage five or six years ago, and has never given me a chance to talk to any other man. He frightens me sometimes with the things he says, and I know I'll never be able to defy him properly unless I marry some one who isn't afraid of him. You're not afraid of him, are you?"

"No — I don't think so. But are you sure there isn't some one else you know better than you do me — some one you possibly — er — like better? Marriage is a very serious business."

"I know it is. That's why I don't want to marry Ralph."

"Have you told him so?"

"Often—but he won't believe me. You see, he thinks he loves me; and he's a selfish little beast—"

"Good Heavens!"

"Yes—I mean it. He only thinks of me between the splurges he takes. I'm his cousin, and it's on the cards that I'm going to marry him, so he doesn't have to bother about being a gentleman. That's his attitude—and I'll have to go through with the horrible thing next June if some one doesn't run away with me in the interval.

"It's useless to say no to papa, and it's worse than useless to run away alone. He'd only find me and bring me back again—and—and torture me a little more."

"Torture you!"

"No — I didn't mean that. Please don't be inquisitive. I'm just afraid of him, that's all. I've tried to fight him; but I can't, and I know that the only way out is to marry some one—else.

"We—I mean—I knew you were coming over to see if—if I were—nice enough — to marry, and when I saw what a vast improvement you were upon Ralph I thought perhaps—well—you're to be here such a short time and —and I was afraid—"

She stopped and put it another way: "Do you think I'm marriageable?"

That was pointblank enough. I was becoming rather chary, too, about meeting her eyes, and I hadn't the courage to tell her that her information about the length and the purpose of my visit to America was all wrong.

"Yes — I must confess you are — marriageable," I admitted honestly enough. "But — er — that is — does Cousin Alice know about all this?"

"She knows my intentions, but she doesn't approve of my methods. They're all my own, and I'm not going to make any apologies for them. Can't you see how desperate I am?"

"Yes, a little. But you don't know anything about me. You may just get out of the frying-pan into the fire. I may have a beastly temper—"

"Can't be any worse than papa's," she interrupted with conviction. "And I wouldn't be afraid of you."

"No, I don't think you would. But you might get awfully tired of seeing me about the place and—"

"Not nearly so tired as I am of Ralph already, and we're not married yet. Please don't make excuses. You couldn't make me half so miserable as I am now if you tried ever so hard—and—and— Would it be so awfully difficult to—like me?"

I cleared my throat and looked out of the taxi window. We were still on the drive.

"Does his nibs know where to go?" I asked, turning to face the music again.

"Yes — he knows, and we're not nearly there yet. I believe you want to run away. Do you?"

"No—no—nothing of the sort," I protested. "I'm enjoying myself immensely. You said that after I had proposed and you had accepted me we could talk business. Hadn't we better talk business first? I mean—my business.

"It is quite proper, you know, in arrangements of this sort, for the penniless earl to declare just how penniless he is, and I'm afraid I couldn't afford to support a wife. You'd be tied for life to a chap whose earning power per week would probably be less than this taxi will cost."

A queer smile parted her lips. She looked beyond me and her immediate surroundings, and seemed to contemplate something that gave her an unholy joy.

"Yes—and papa would be terribly angry, too, if I married you. I think that's why—I want to."

That made me gasp and stare, and before I had time to draw breath she asked simply:

"Did you ever hear of—Bob Dolliver?"

"Wh-what—" I stopped and regarded her for fully a minute in the blankest sort of amazement. But she was looking dreamily out of the cab-window, not paying the slightest attention to me.

"Never mind how I know," she went on, still looking past me. "He ran off with Lady Alice Didderington and very little more than this taxi will cost. He was only a lodgekeeper's son. You are an earl — educated at Eton and Cambridge—I know because I looked you up—and I'll have a quarter of a million of my own—"

"Which doesn't interest me," I interrupted, probably more sharply than I intended. "Won't you tell me how you came to know anything about Lady—"

"No. Can't answer any questions — but one. And you haven't asked that yet."

I laughed in spite of my chagrin.

"Well, the point is, I can't support a wife, and I haven't the least intention of having a wife support me. I came over here—and I might as well

be frank with you — with five thousand dollars in the hope that I could make it fifty thousand inside of six months. But I suppose I'm an ass. I haven't the faintest idea of where to begin, and I've wasted one precious week already bothering with—"

I stopped, finding two brown eyes widely attentive, with a look in them suggesting that their owner did not believe her ears.

"You—you have—five thousand! In ready cash?"

"Well — say — forty-five hundred now. Why?"

"Wait. I want to think a minute. It's too splendid for anything!" And she thought a second or two. "If I tell you how you can turn that money into—oh—ever and ever so much more —will you—"

Her fingers closed about my own again almost fiercely. I couldn't laugh. She was so terribly serious about it.

"That's bribery," I told her, and wondered why my voice was so quiet.

"Well, can't you like me? I think I want you to very much. You're so different from Ralph and—and lots of others I've seen, and I thought it would be splendid if you and I could make a lot of money together right under papa's nose and run off with it—like Bob Dolliver and Lady Alice."

Somehow I got hold of her other hand. I don't know just how it happened; but there we sat, holding hands and looking at each other, coming to an eye-to-eye understanding about things, while the lights upon either side of us went jogging past. That chauffeur knew his business.

Then Margaret smiled and the silent spell was broken.

"I am not a marrying man," I said.

"Rubbish! I think you'd be very, very good to anybody you liked."

"Thank you. And you are really willing to take the awful chance?"

"Yes." No bones about that monosyllable.

"All right. I'll tell you what we'll do."

"Yes?"

I think she came a little nearer to me.

"I am to be here at least six months. If at the end of that time I've made any money, and you still feel inclined to faint well enough to get away from wherever you are, so as to be able to meet me at Grant's Tomb in a taxi without any money—we'll purchase a license and hunt up a minister. How's that?"

"We don't need a license in New York State—just the minister," she advised thoughtfully; and such was the case at the time.

"October, November, December, January, February, March," she repeated, loosening her grip upon my hand to count the months off on her fingers. "Um—no—I don't care for March much. Let's make it December — that's three months — and have a Christmassy atmosphere. I think that's long enough—don't you?"

I wasn't sure, and I suppose my expression said so.

"Just think," she suggested, and watched my face closely, "I've got to play engaged to Ralph all that time!"

That startled me. More than that—it hurt!

"Yes, I suppose you must," I agreed. "And that isn't very pleasant, is it? But suppose we do make it three months — what are we going to live on? We haven't even the usual excuse that love will find a way."

She looked up quickly.

"Haven't we? I think we have if we're not afraid. Listen!"

Our hands came together again by the merest accident, and while the taxi rattled on, Margaret told me the story of papa and papa's friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAW NICHT.

If a man can't talk safely behind closed doors in his own house, where on earth can he do so?

Papa had taken his friend into the library, closing the door very tightly; but didn't think about the door leading from the library into the music-room. It looked closed, so it is to be supposed that he did not bother about it.

Toward the end of the interview, when his friend said a little excitedly, "We can send it up to five hundred if we want to," papa seemed to think of the door leading to the music-room, and, tiptoeing to it, discovered that it was not as tightly shut as he had imagined.

Throwing it open suddenly, he found Margaret looking lazily up at him from a copy of the libretto of the "Pirates of Penzance."

"What is it, papa?" she asked, and appeared so innocent and disinterested that papa really did not know what it was.

"Nothing—oh, nothing at all," he said very fidgety, at the cross-roads of doubt and fear and anger. "But I think you had better go to your room."

It was too late then, however, even though papa actually thought his daughter too unsophisticated to know the meaning of a "corner on Rand Island." Perhaps he imagined that her young mind would conceive it to be an acre or so of land. But it didn't.

Not only did she know what a "corner" meant, but also what it meant to be "caught short fifty thousand." She hadn't been papa's daughter for eighteen years for nothing.

It was such a simple little corner, too.

The total issue of Rand Island stock was two hundred thousand shares. Papa and his friend had quietly accumulated one hundred and five thousand, fifty thousand of which their victim had sold short in three months at a rising price of from fifty to eighty. One man in San Francisco held fifty thousand, but those were too far away to be troublesome at a day's notice.

The balance was scattered over the country at large, and papa and his friend were gathering in everything that lay near enough to New York to be useful—probably ten thousand or so. Like the San Francisco lot, and for the same reason, the remainder was not dangerous enough to bother about.

The victim's name was not mentioned, but it was the laudable intention of papa and his friend to reduce his bank account considerably, if not actually relegate him to New Street—which is to say, break him.

On Wednesday of the following week they would proceed to buy him in, bidding the stock up and up and up, knowing very well that almost every share that could possibly be bought for delivery the following day was in their possession.

All that did Margaret gather from the libretto of the "Pirates of Penzance"; papa's friend having a staccato voice which would not suffer much modulation and a habit of repeating himself as if he were afraid he would not be properly understood.

When Margaret went to her room she arranged the facts and figures nicely upon a sheet of paper so that she would not jumble them up afterward.

At a "conservative" estimate, the stock would go up to two hundred—and the victim would enrich papa and his friend six or seven millions!

The cab was circling Central Park by that time. How it got there I don't know, because I hadn't been paying particular attention. Margaret's cheeks were a little flushed and a wayward strand of her hair tickled my chin. I didn't mind.

"That is very interesting," I declared when the story ended. "How much could I make with forty-five hundred?"

"Oh—lots—but I want to make something, too. Not for me—for us. We're in partnership."

"I see. That sounds rather pleasant, but you mustn't include the quarter of a million you threw at my head a little while ago."

"I can't—because I can't touch it till I'm twenty-one. Mama left it to me. I haven't much ready cash, and I don't want to use what I have got because I think papa looks at my checkbook every day on the sly. The only thing I can do is to raise loans on my rings and things—"

"Wh-what! Great guns, child, wherever did you—"

"You're silly," she interrupted gently, creeping a little nearer to me and softly laughing my horror away. "Why shouldn't I? It would only be for a few days, and I could stay in bed with the shivers or something, so that I wouldn't have to wear them, and nobody would know they were gone. I'm sure you could raise forty-five hundred on my pendant and necklace alone."

"I—could?"

She nodded in the most matter-of-fact way in the world.

"I'm going to send them round to you to-morrow when papa is out. And on Monday morning about ten o'clock, because it's quieter then, you'll go to Nospim's with them and get them to loan you all you can.

"Then on Thursday morning you'll get them out again. That isn't difficult. Just think of me having to stay in bed, pretending I'm terribly ill and having to take all kinds of stupid, nasty medicines!"

I didn't say anything—just looked; and we studied each other for a minute or two. I got the worst of it. No man ever conflicted with eyes like those and got off scathless.

"Now that's settled," she announced with a triumphant little smile. "And we are near the place where you must get out. When you do, don't say good-by to me or anything. Just pay the chauffeur and walk away. He knows where to go."

"Jove! You've got the whole business down to a very fine science."

"Have I?" Her mouth twisted queerly 'twixt a smile and a tear. "You see, I was desperate—and necessity, you know? You don't think I'm terribly brazen, do you?"

"No—no, of course not. I rather like it."

"Honestly?"

Her hand strayed to the lapel of my coat in a proprietary sort of way, and I imagined she was a lonely little soul.

"Yes, I'm quite certain of it. Were you not just a little afraid?"

She glanced up quickly in surprise.

"Of you? No, not a bit. I think you have the kindest face of any man I ever met."

That settled it. No one had ever said anything quite so nice as that to me before. She owned me from that moment; and I would have given much to have had Sysonsby hear her say it. But it embarrassed me, and, to change the subject, I asked:

"Where did your aunt get that limping butler?"

"Gracious! What a jump! Why, from England, of course. Couldn't you tell that?"

"Yes, quite plainly. I've seen him before somewhere and I'm afraid he recognized me."

"Oh, please don't think that!" She clutched my arms fearfully. "What makes you think he did?"

"Nothing at all—just intuition. I thought he wrote that note. The hand is so very masculine. It isn't yours, is it?"

She hesitated and looked away.

"No, it isn't mine."

"Well, that's all right," I said as lightly as possible. "Don't let's bother about it. I just thought I'd like to—"

The cab stopped, and I did not finish the sentence.

"My station, isn't it?"

"Yes, and please don't be angry. You may kiss me if you think you ought to."

Since there was no time to study the matter from more than one angle, I thought I ought to—and she did not flinch.

"Good night—Margaret," I whispered.

"Good night—Jack."

She crept away into her corner, and I stepped out upon the sidewalk, searching for money.

The chauffeur had not moved from his seat.

"What's the damage?" I asked.

"Tin dollars," he answered, without emotion, looking straight ahead.

I paid — and found a card where the bill had been! It was a plain white card with some writing on it.

"It's a braw nicht, sir."

The depth and breadth of the sound made me jerk my head up as the taxi rolled away, and I stared after it for a minute or two till it vanished around a corner.

Then I struck a match and looked more closely at the writing upon the card.

> Congratulations. Meet me in half an hour at the "Clachan of Aberfoyle," Eleventh Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street. Take a Fifty-Ninth Street cross-town trolley to Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth. Walk one block west.

That was crowded upon one side.

The other had a border of small red and black squares. In the center was neatly printed:

FOR CHARITY

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLACHAN OF ABERFOYLE.

I PULLED up with a jerk under a lamp that said "Central Park South" —which mystified me completely—and to save the bother of asking questions I took a taxi, unconscious that I was then on Fifty-Ninth Street, which is disguised for a few squares under the above more pleasant-sounding title.

Since Campbell had said I was to take a tram to Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street, I gave the chauffeur that direction and intended to look about me before proceeding to the "Clachan," which I presumed was a public house, or, I suppose I should say, saloon, to make myself more intelligible.

When I gave the instructions to the chauffeur he asked me to repeat it, and, apparently, did not care for it any more the second time than the first.

However, we rattled across through the glare of Columbus Circle, getting a glimpse of the giddy swirl of Broadway, which is more advertised than any other thoroughfare anywhere.

Its lights flashed a moment or two and died out suddenly as we went on toward Eighth Avenue, which, I have since learned, is distinguished principally for the consistency with which it places a public place — I mean saloon —on every corner, and in having trams that run direct to the Polo Grounds.

The people one saw were different. There was a shuffling irresponsibility in their movements — a stoop-shouldered dejection that, in Tenth Avenue, became still more dejected, or, in the case of the younger generation forming in little groups at every corner, developed into an insolent swagger that is both ugly and dangerous.

Shadows that grew deeper and deeper seemed to hang about everything in spite of the electric light.

When my cab stopped, and I got out to pay the chap, I found myself at what appeared to be a tram-terminal. Occupying practically a whole square was a place where off-duty trams are stored and repaired.

Consequently there was plenty of light and life and bustle of a sort; people getting into starting cars and people getting out of cars coming in; conductors, motormen, and so forth.

But beyond that evidence of respectable activity was an atmosphere surcharged with unpleasant possibilities.

Glancing about me, and finding that I was an object of interest for several pairs of eyes, probably because I had come out of a taxicab, and catching sight of a very suspicious-looking chap lurking in the shadow of the car-barn wall opposite, I turned quickly about and walked toward the river.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the fellow cross over and follow me!

The street was practically deserted. Upon one side of it, for three-quarters of a block, there is no sidewalk; nothing save the blank wall of the car-barn, and on the opposite side, after one has passed a few dimly lit shops, the dull fronts of a few factories, a church and some wretched frame houses.

Under a lamp midway I sighted the figure of a man hugging the wall, moving with a shambling gait toward me, while the soft pad of the feet behind came nearer as I passed out of the light of the shops.

Naturally I hurried. For a moment or two I had the wild suspicion of a trap, and, of course, remembered that Campbell had said I was a nuisance to some people he knew, and that a life could be bought for a meal.

Then the man in front lurched unsteadily out from the wall and immediately staggered back to it again.

When I reached him a quick glance told me that he was very drunk; my ears caught incoherent mumblings and a perfectly distinct question as to the whereabouts of Nessie—whoever she was.

I went right on.

The padding feet behind stopped.

Almost instantly there were sounds of conflict; first of words—an intermingling of strange oaths—then a sharp scuffle, terminating in a squeal of pain.

It was none of my business, and I did not even turn my head to see what had happened. The lights of a public house—dash it all, why can't I write saloon the first time—on the corner of Eleventh Avenue were very inviting.

Crossing the street as speedily as I could without running, I made a beeline for the place, which, being the only one in sight, I presumed must be the Clachan.

The swing-doors gave very readily, so readily that I was in the midst of things, as it were, before I realized it, and bumped unpleasantly into a negro who was on his way out.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I apologized, and the fellow, first growling a thick imprecation, thrust out an enormous hand, grabbed me by the shoulder and jerked me out of the way in the most unceremonious fashion, and leered.

"Yo' jes' a puppy dawg!" he informed me over his shoulder. "An' a yaller pup at dat. Be glaid ah don' make sausage-meat ou' o' yer."

Evidently spoiling for a fight, he opened his wide mouth and laughed till the sound filled the place, instantly drawing upon us the attention of the ugly, motley crew about the bar.

They were a mixture of black and white, and to all appearances the scum of both; some bull-necked, huge-armed, slant-eyed brutes; others scraggy and sniveling; others lithe, quick and crafty; all of them possibly with a price hardly worth bothering about.

They seemed to take my situation in at a glance, and their expressions indicated that they were watching for the sequel—to see what I would do. The black hulk of humanity who had called me a "puppy" also waited.

Of course I'm not a fool. I ignored the whole batch of them and appealed to the red-faced giant behind the bar.

"I have an appointment with a Mr. Campbell—" I began, and was instantly interrupted by a burst of leering laughter in which the barkeeper joined.

"Guess you've got the wrong shop," he told me.

"Ya-as, Mistah Puppy Dawg," my insolent colored friend chipped in. "Yo' suah's in de wrong pew. Lak crackers, Mistah Puppy Dawg?"

"Here you, cut that out!"

The advice came from the bartender a trifle too late. An oyster-cracker, plucked from the lunch-counter, struck me just a fraction below the left eye—and it stung like the dickens.

With an effort I controlled my temper, while the others, scenting sport at my expense, waited, mumbling or grinning their appreciation of the situation. The bartender seemed undecided for a minute or two. My negro leered again:

"Well, Mistah Puppy Dawg, what you gwine tuh dew 'bout it?"

"If the gentleman behind the bar and the gentlemen before it will give me a chance and see fair play — I'll thrash you."

Some one choked, another guffawed, the rest muttered among themselves, craning forward as if to get a better look at me.

My negro's leer slowly vanished. I did not take my eyes off his for a moment.

"Yo'll t'rash me? Yew will?"

His great bulk suddenly lurched toward me, his enormous fists clenched as if ready to pound me to a jelly.

The bartender called a warning sharply; the others backed away.

Of course I was horribly scared. The fellow was so big and brutal, and I was not at all certain of a fair chance. There wasn't much room, either, to give me the use of my legs to escape the awful weight of the fellow's fists.

Sidestepping, I took him on the chin and jabbed his nose before he had any opportunity to know what had happened. He bellowed like a bull, swung his arms like the sails of a windmill, and because I wasn't there to get the benefit of it all, he flopped wildly across a small table—to the extreme joy of every one but the bartender, whose white apron I was hazily conscious of seeing flying over the bar.

The negro staggered upright, wiping some blood from his face, and an ominous growl sounded behind me as the bartender suddenly seized my arm.

"Leave him be!"

"Gee! He's a white hope!"

"He ain't so green!"

"Kill him, Batch! Soak it to him!"

"Aw—have a heart! Beat it, mister, while your shoes are good!"

A jumble of comment came from the crowd. The bartender rushed me toward the door and I made no resistance.

A horrible oath sounded behind me—and the scuffling rush of many feet.

Suddenly the doors parted inwardly.

"Gregarach!"

The queer sounding name burst from several throats, and the sudden quiet that followed it was like a pall.

My escort halted, and his hand fell from my arm. The ardor of the others went out like a snuffed lamp. All at once I felt peculiarly safe.

Within the doorway stood a man in a long rain-coat reaching to his ankles, and wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat drawn well down over his eyes.

By the height and girth of him I knew it was Campbell.

CHAPTER X.

"THE GREGARACH."

For a moment or two he stood perfectly still, ignoring me completely, his steely glance going over my shoulder to the silent group behind.

Then, all at once, he moved, passing me like a cavalry charge, and, as I quickly turned my head, I heard the unmistakable impact of fist with face and saw my negro crumple and sink to the floor.

Something glittering white slipped from his hand and slid along the oilcloth almost to my feet.

I stooped and picked it up—a razor.

Batch's friends appeared anxious to get as far away from the conflict as possible, leaving half-finished "beers" strung out upon the bar and herding toward the "family entrance" which afforded an exit upon Eleventh Avenue.

My negro made no effort to rise. He lay so strangely still that I began to feel chilly, when Campbell, standing over the huddled form, turned his face slowly toward me, and asked in still broader Scotch than he had used on the Randania.

"Do ye no' place ony mair value on yer life than to pick a quarrel wi' this scum?" And indicating Batch, he looked at the bartender sharply. "I'll speak tae ye about this later, Andy. See that somebody take him hame. Where's Beans?"

As he put the question he caught my eye and jerked his head toward the door of a room, which a placard declared was "Closed."

The negro stirred and moaned, but his evil-countenanced brethren made no move to his assistance. They were afraid of Campbell, uncertain of his attitude toward them, and eyed me up and down dully and questioningly.

"Beans was here less than half an hour ago," the bartender replied to Campbell's question, speaking to the back of the latter's head, as my queer friend moved in the direction of the room he had indicated. "He said he was just going up to Tenth Avenue."

"Send him in tae me when he comes back."

I followed him into the room marked "Closed," in which were several small round tables, with cane-bottomed chairs arranged about them. Upon the walls were colored prints of equine favorites, jockeys and ballet-dancers.

Campbell closed the door behind me, shutting out the parasitical crew in the family entrance, and, glancing about the room as if to be sure that we were to be quite alone, waved me to a chair. His actions were peculiarly deliberate and cautious, and he apparently considered the dim light we had sufficient.

The member of select society had vanished. Even the face seemed changed. His long tan overcoat might have belonged to a hack-driver, and his shoes were in keeping with it.

Following his every movement blankly, I sat down.

Then I found him looking down at me and smiling.

"I'm afraid," he said dryly, "that if Margaret saw you now with that fearsome weapon in your hand she would hesitate about taking another cab-ride with you."

I put the razor which I had been clutching upon the table.

"That's better," he conceded, seating himself opposite me and stretching out his great legs, revealed some of the awful checked suit he wore below his coat. "A razor is a particularly deadly thing in the hands of a man like Batch, who would have had as little compunction about slitting your jugular as I would have in breaking a match. He does not come here very often, but when he does there is always trouble of some sort. The last time he was here I told Andy not to serve him again."

"And I suppose the bartender had been obeying orders," I suggested, feeling that Andy was possibly being misjudged. "I collided with the beggar as he was going out, and he was as mad as the dickens. But how is it that Andy didn't know who I meant when I asked for Mr. Campbell?"

My companion suddenly pounded the table with his fist in vigorous protest, making the razor dance.

"Campbell! Dinna 'Campbell' me here! My name is 'MacGregor,' and them that ken me best ca' me the 'Gregarach.' If ye would be safe hereabout, an' mak' freens an' keep them, ye'll remember that."

I suppose I looked bewildered and uncertain of how to take his advice. His expression became less thunderous.

"Gregarach means the Chief MacGregor," he explained quietly. "Even Beans Borrowman uses the word and hardly knows that it is Gaelic, or, if he does, is not sure whether Gaelic is a language or a country.

"Beans, I may inform you, is one

of the few—the very few—pickpockets—or dips, as they call themselves—in the business who has been clever enough to avoid working for Uncle Sam. I advised him to be at Fifty-Fourth Street and Tenth Avenue to meet you, and can't understand why he didn't. I presume you came by trolley?"

"No — I took a taxi—" I began, and he scowled, so I stopped to see if he intended to put the scowl into words. "But I got out at Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street and walked down here."

The scowl vanished.

"There was a chap — very suspicious, I thought—hugging the car-barn wall at the corner, and when I started down here he followed me, but stopped half-way down the street to scrap with a drunken fellow who seemed anxious about 'Nessie.'"

The Gregarach — I must remember that name, because, to be quite frank, I think it was a salve to Campbell's vanity—nodded his head slowly several times, and his eyebrows, heavy and of a dark-red hue, rose and fell.

"Yes—I suppose that was Beans's father. Filial duty comes before all else, or it should, and doubtless in preventing that blatherskite of a father of his from getting too far from home, he was doing me a service.

"When Borrowman senior is sober he is a plasterer perpetually unemployed. When he is drunk he talks incessantly, and often dangerously, of matters that are of no concern of his, but which might be interesting to what writers are pleased to call 'the limbs of the law.'

"By the way, I believe that reliable information against the Gregarach is worth a bonny penny in Mulberry Street, and will probably be worth more when we have disposed of the Rollins matter.

"If you should meet a detective named Parks, a central office man he is, you could possibly make five thousand by telling him where he could find me in the daytime. I met him in the City Hall yesterday as I came out of the surrogate's office, and he touched his hat to me very respectfully. Funny, isn't it?"

I laughed in spite of myself, and felt myself slipping into his net without a struggle, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do.

His contempt for Parks and what Parks represented was supreme. One could not help admiring him, and there was no hint of treachery in his face.

"You have taken a lot for granted with me," I declared. "That card you gave me—a newspaper report I read—and—this—why, man, I know enough to—"

"Believe what I am going to tell you," he interrupted calmly, removing his hat and harkening to the muffled sounds that came from the barroom and the street.

"I take nothing for granted in any man," he continued. "From Batch upward. But when a man needs me and I need him, there is a bond of faith already established.

"I have introduced you to Rollins, made you suffer his company, given you a glimpse of his daughter as he affects her and as she really is, and shown you a way of redeeming what your fathers have lost. Whether you take advantage of the chance is your own affair. But now I am going to tell you a story, and I found it necessary to bring you here, because I want you to know the place thoroughly."

I gaped.

"What the dickens does it matter whether—"

"Seems strange, doesn't it?"

He studied my face curiously.

"But no more strange than the fact that if you died Rollins would become the—Earl of Didderington."

"What?"

I almost screamed it and jumped half out of my chair to lean across the table and stare into his quiet eyes.

He nodded.

"Wait. This is Beans."

He spoke very low and glanced toward the door, and, as I sank limply back into my chair, feeling that I was being cheated by the delay, a young man, cap in hand, slipped into the room, closing the door noiselessly.

"The old man—" he began hurriedly, as he came forward.

"I know," the Gregarach interrupted. "Batch gone?"

"Yes, sir. Saw him bein' helped up th' av'noo, sir."

"Good. Shake hands with Mr. Mason. Mason, this is my lieutenant and friend—Mr. Beans Borrowman."

Beans's hand shot forward, and I rose and took it gravely.

"Glad to know you, sir," he said in a peculiarly quiet voice, while I muttered something about the pleasure being mutual, trying to grasp the fact that I was hobnobbing with thieves and all sorts of questionable people.

Meeting him in a casual way, one would never have taken the trouble to look at Beans twice. He suggested the young, ill-paid mechanic, who counts each new suit or pair of shoes as being "so much at so much per week."

His face seemed dusty, encouraging an inclination to wipe it off with a dry rag, and the curious gray eyes, that looked out at one from under strangely scattered eyebrows, gave one the impression that the world was an everlasting surprise to him. In his build—of medium height, his shoulders slightly guilty of the slouch of his class—there was a hint of supple strength and quickness.

"Put him to bed?" the Gregarach asked lightly, referring to the "old man."

"Yes, sir—strapped."

"Good. Della been round to-day?"

"No, sir. Ain't seen her since Monday, sir."

"Um—all right. Take this round to Mrs. Phalen—and tell her to pay two months' rent out of it. She's one in arrears, you know, and I'm afraid Danny doesn't tell her the whole truth about these things."

His eyes swung lazily upon me.

"Mrs. Phalen is blind," he advised, and turned to Beans again. "Tell Danny he's to go to Corcoran's Monday morning at eight sharp. Timekeeper. And you might slip into Blakeley's and ask him about his rheumatism. Doc Briggs was to see him to-day. Davie Marks and his sister get away all right?"

"Yes, sir," Beans replied, taking the proffered envelope as a matter of course. "The kid was looking pretty bad, sir."

A furrow appeared between the Gregarach's eyes.

"Yes—it's a pity we didn't know sooner. But Colorado Springs should help. Heard anything from Brannigan?"

"Just a card from Phœnix, sir. He says it's all to the mustard down there, sir."

"I hope so. Gibbs seems to be surviving, at any rate, and he was in worse shape than Brannigan. Any reports from Crabbe or Paler?"

"Crabbe sent Crowley down to say there was nothin' doin' yet—an' Paler will be in to-morrow. Gregg's bunch are mostly hangin' round. When you was away they wouldn't woik for me steady, and I think you'll have to talk to Gregg, sir.

"His crowd gets nasty roun' me—hollerin' for a bigger rakeoff and wantin' to get back to shootin' up the town. Lyin' low, woikin' quiet, gets on their noives, an' what wit' Batch tryin' to get the Lumber Gang to come down an' muss us up—I ain't had much of a chanst to git 'em woikin' as I'd like, sir."

I could only dimly understand—like the chap who hears two doctors holding a consultation over him, but the Gregarach listened attentively, eying his lieutenant in quiet interrogation.

"Sure you are not losing your grip—hunting for Smith?"

Beans pulled his head back as if avoiding a blow. Quite evidently the reference to Smith had startled him.

"No, sir," he answered sullenly, "I ain't had time to hunt for him. An' I give you my woid before you went to Europe that I wouldn't do nothin' till you got back. Ain't that right?"

"Quite right. But please be careful not to get too indignant with me. I don't like it. You can put Gregg on Batch's track. That will give him something to do. And if Batch shows signs of being a trouble-maker—Gregg has a free hand outside of guns and things like this."

He held up the negro's razor, looked steadily at Beans for a moment or two, then handed it over to him.

"Throw it into the river and see Gregg if you can, to-night. When you are going out tell Andy I've forgiven him—and to keep a careful eye upon that door. Mr. Mason and I do not wish to be disturbed. Good night."

"Good night, sir," Beans returned, and, nodding to me, went swiftly and noiselessly out.

I glanced into Campbell's face and found him amused.

"That was a nuisance, wasn't it?" he asked, as if he appreciated my anxiety to get back to Rollins. "But now it's done, and we will resume our acquaintance with Mr. R."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY HE TOLD.

A BURST of raucous laughter came from the barroom. A cart of some sort rattling down the street and a motor-horn not far off were among the last sounds I heard before Campbell, with his eyes going steadily over my shoulder toward the door, began the story that even made the tables round about me fade as I watched his face and listened.

It began with the elopement of Lady Alice Didderington and Bob Dolliver away back in 1832. Apparently they had emigrated to New York, where their only child, Alice Dolliver, was born.

She, in her turn, married a chap named Ralph Rollins, and they had two children—the Rollins of my story and Mrs. Van Huysen.

Lady Alice had lived to see her grandchildren married and to welcome another generation into the world. She died in the fall of 1890.

The Campbells and the Rollins-Dolliver families had grown up together—financially as well as socially.

When Campbell was a boy he used to sit on Lady Alice's knee while she told him of her memories of Waterloo and of the things in her childhood that had frightened her.

One always remembers the things in one's infant days that frightened one; and her father seemed to have been remarkable in that particular. Even as a great-grandmother, she still appeared rather afraid of him.

Campbell was in the room an hour before she died. He said she was a good old soul—a sort of second mother to him after his own died. She was in a sort of delirium, but she knew him and made him kneel by the bed and speak to her.

Mrs. Van Huysen was there, and a nurse and a doctor; but the old lady held on to him in spite of them, and while she was rumpling his hair, sometimes talking rationally, sometimes rambling, she suddenly said, quite clearly:

"I can see it, Robbie! Over there—the old lodge-gate and—he's lying on his face—so still—so terribly still!"

I found Campbell peering at me suddenly through half-closed lids.

"There was a fear in that old woman's eyes I shall never forget," he said quietly. "Fear of something terrible! You know how her father died?"

"Yes," I replied, wondering what he was driving at. "He was shot in the back of the head at the lodge-gate."

A shadow of disappointment crossed his face, and I had a strange suspicion that he knew more of my family history than I did.

Evidently they put him out of the room after that; but he was a boy of fourteen at the time, and he never forgot it.

Then he came to the near present, which was more important than a century-old mystery.

Rollins, in Campbell's opinion, was the reincarnation of the forefather of mine who was shot at the lodge-gate. There was nothing too mean for him, nothing too low.

His intention had been to give his daughter and his nephew the deeds to Didderington on their wedding-day. That was his original and only idea in taking up all the mortgages.

Campbell gave him the other one.

I didn't know what he meant, but he went on without looking at me.

"You see, Rollins knew who and what I am in my leisure hours. He's known it ever since that night I took my safety and bonny Nessie Borrowman by the hand and made him promise by all his gods to marry her."

"Good Heavens!"

My exclamation fell to a whisper.

"And the next day he slipped out of my hands for London."

I might as well not have been in the room, for all the attention he paid to me; and as he produced his watch in a lackadaisical sort of way, glancing at it as if the hour did not interest him, he added without looking at me:

"Rollins is the 'Smith' for whom Beans is looking."

Feeling limp and horror-stricken, I sat watching my companion's face, wondering what I could say. Then, as if he knew what I wanted to ask, he continued in a low monotone, still watching the door:

"He met her while she was on the road with the 'Foibles.' The program called her Lily Beaufort. She was a good girl; rough, of course, given to slang and the gossip of the dressing-room; but when she was in New York she spent most of her time keeping her father out of saloons.

"I forgot the name Rollins gave her—Somers or Somerville, I think it was—but he did not let the matter rest in Rochester. Perhaps for a few months he was actually infatuated with her, and met her frequently during that time, even in New York."

The girl trusted him implicitly, though Heaven knows how she managed it; and when she came to tell Campbell—MacGregor, as she knew him—about it, her description of Rollins, particularly of his cravats, gave him away completely. I could readily believe that. Rollins's neckwear, to any one who knew him, was fatal.

After he ran away to Europe, Campbell lost all trace of Miss Borrowman for several months. Then he got a note from a stranger saying that the girl wished to see him.

He found her in Passaic, living with a girl who used to be in the same company.

"What transpired at the bedside," Campbell declared, as if the memory was a particularly painful one, "does not matter. But that poor girl died because she did not want to live."

She had not told of having approached Campbell before, or anything about his previous connection with the affair; nothing but the fact that Smith had promised to marry her and had run off to Europe.

Five minutes after she died her sister and Beans arrived.

They, too, had been sent for at the dead girl's request, but her friend could tell them nothing except the name by which Miss Borrowman knew Rollins. So they called him Smith for short.

Beans was murderous at once. He haunted the docks for weeks, searching for a man whom he had never seen and of whom he had no description.

Nessie Borrowman's erstwhile roommate was more sensible. While Beans was clamoring for blood she was wondering if Smith had any money, and claimed, with much wisdom, that a dead Smith wouldn't be worth much. The

longer he lived, the longer he would pay.

"And that's all you need know about it," Campbell finished abruptly. "I have protected Rollins's worthless life for a year and kept Beans from—murder."

I think I shrank a little.

"Aye—it's an ugly word, but Beans and his kind haven't much method in their madness. They are gathered from the ends of the earth, the ragged ends mostly—born behind the bars almost—and their manners are crude. They dig great holes in their enemies and scatter gore about shamefully; but, man, they're bairns when you handle them right—just bairns."

"I suppose so," I said, and waited.

"Rollins would sell me to-morrow, if he dared," he continued heavily. "But he is afraid; not so much of me as of my people."

There was something akin to pride in that "my people." In that moment I felt that somewhere in his life was a sorrow that gnawed; one for which Rollins might have been responsible, and of which he did not care to speak.

"In this city it would take months to prove anything against me—if anything were ever proved at all, and Rollins is afraid of what might happen in the interval.

"But he is a constant menace—you can appreciate that—hating me intensely for my knowledge. My idea is that, when he finally goes to England, he will leave a message with Detective Parks before he sails."

"You don't mean to say that he would—"

"Why not?" Campbell questioned. "He is quite capable of it if he thought he would be safe in England. I tell you the man is small and he is afraid of me.

"To make it worse, he thinks I am so afraid of him that I am likely to put Beans on his track at any time, and he has not forgotten the night when I pictured to him what would happen if the girl's brother ever found him. It was pressure of that sort that brought from him the promise he made the girl and me, and I suppose the same pressure induced him to take the first boat to Europe."

"But when he got back, couldn't you—"

"A few weeks before I heard of Nessie Borrowman's story," he interrupted and as if I had not spoken. "I went to him on another matter—never mind why—and I told him to buy the Didderington estates, kill you, and become an earl all by himself, if he wanted to, but, for Heaven's sake, to give his daughter a chance to grow up and choose a husband for herself."

I sat up a little straighter in my chair.

"He told me to go to the devil," Campbell continued easily. "And after the exchange of a few compliments I left.

"After he had crawled back from Europe we avoided each other for a while. If I thought he was to be at the Van Huysens', I would not go there, and he never appeared while I was on the scene. I think he was afraid of what I might do if I met him—and so was I. Then—he came to me."

Rollins had declared that it was a friendly call; to bury the hatchet and so forth. As he spoke he fumbled nervously with his hands, as if he did not know what to do with them.

He took a chair by the table under a lamp, the light of which made the round bald spot on the top of his head glisten like a billiard-ball. Host and guest were in evening clothes, and the latter was constantly casting slanting glances of apparent understanding toward several newspapers that had fallen beside Campbell's chair.

A prominent banker had been shot and killed in the Bronx the evening before.

The papers said uncomplimentary things about the police, and spoke of the baffling, Machiavelian, demoralizing—all those adjectives, mind you—effectiveness of organization among a

company of West End youths, generally and fearfully referred to as the "Rob Roy gang."

Campbell had been reading the things people were saying about his "boys," and knowing that they had nothing to do with the horrible business, he was rather annoyed. Everything that was at all clever in a criminal way in New York was laid at their door, which became very unfair when murder was the charge, since the Gegarach had no patience with people who could not take a man's money and give him a chance to feel the loss.

When Rollins came, Campbell at once believed he had come to speak of the murder—a natural conclusion, since his visitor was aware of his host's connection with the accused Rob Roy gang.

But no—it was just a friendly call. He had hoped that Campbell had come to realize how utterly impossible that other thing had been, and since he and Campbell's father had been such bosom friends, since Campbell had been such a favorite with the late Lady Alice, it was really a pity they could not understand each other better.

And Rollins's gaze traveled meaningly to the newspapers upon the floor; but he did not mention the banker's death—not a syllable.

Campbell agreed with him; gave him to drink and to smoke; and waited.

Rollins, trifling with his glass, appeared to steady himself, and, apropos of nothing at all, asked quite suddenly:

"I wonder if that fool on the other side can possibly scrape together the mortgage on that lodge? It's only fifty thousand, you know?"

"He might—just to be devilish," Campbell returned easily. "You want that piece of property pretty badly, don't you?"

Rollins's eyes narrowed a little. He side-stepped his host's question.

"Oh, I'm not worrying about it—no, not at all—but I'd like to get it. My grandfather Dolliver was born in the lodge, you know, and it will spoil the whole thing if I don't get it—confound him!"

"Who? Your grandfather or—"

"That nincompoop who calls himself the earl, of course."

"He's never done you any harm, has he?"

"Harm! Him? Rubbish!" Rollins laughed at the idea. "In a year or two, probably, the useless, penniless fool will be defiling his name in cheap lodgings in Bloomsbury, or be peddling shoelaces on my sidewalk. In a year from now I'll have everything he owns but his title"—here he glanced at the newspapers again, then quickly up into Campbell's face—"and I could buy that for a miserly little ten-dollar bill."

"Yes, I suppose you could," the host agreed carelessly. "I know where you could do it for less, if you were not particular about the company you kept."

Rollins almost knocked over his glass. He mumbled something unintelligible, and tried to appear as if he had not heard what Campbell had said.

Startled from its gloomy lair, the thing upon Rollins's mind had jumped into light, and, though it vanished just as quickly, Campbell pulled it out again and kept it there, watching it grow.

"It does seem a pity that the thread of one man's life should stand between you and a coronet. It's such a tiny thread, too—that could be cut in a second. If there were three or four people in the way it would be different—but one—just one! Galling, isn't it?"

Rollins's cheeks went white and red in turn.

"Down in the Kitchen," Campbell resumed, "we do those things scientifically. A man's life is only worth so much as he is willing to pay to keep it. Some men love to live; others, apparently, do not care particularly.

"I am judging by the price they offer. It is an interesting study—and one's hands can be kept quite clean.

There are professionals, you know, who do that sort of thing for a song, and get drunk upon the music. They kill between drinks, as it were."

Rollins listened like a starving man in sight of food; and Campbell led him on with lies—wonderful, murderous lies.

Have you ever met a man who is aching to find some one who is as big a scoundrel as himself, to whom he can talk and from whom he may, perhaps, get advice and encouragement?

"That," Campbell told me, "was Rollins that night."

My existence was tearing at his liver like a vulture; and the more he thought of it the more he suffered. It was such a little barrier; the most unreliable thing in the world; so slender and uncertain that in a second of time it could be wiped out—even with the flash of a ten-dollar bill!

In the light of the lamp, Rollins's complexion had turned the color of cigar-ash. His mouth struggled to form words that would not come.

"Once you told me—to do it, you know," he said thickly. "I've wondered since if you meant it."

Campbell nodded slowly, as if killing a man were a thing of no importance; Rollins scrutinized him, plainly uncertain of how to accept his point of view. Then his attention was drawn to the newspapers again.

"But if—suppose we—that is—how would he come over to the States?"

"That's simple. The least of our troubles. Do you want him brought over?"

Rollins hesitated, then quite suddenly swung upon Campbell and leaned toward him.

"Let's understand each other," he demanded in the tone of a man who is tired of subterfuge, yet is angry at having to come out of concealment. "You're a crook, and I know it. That thing in the newspapers would not do you any good if I went to headquarters with a story."

"All right," Campbell agreed, unabashed. "Go on."

"Well—you know—what I want."

"Is that a threat?" Campbell's voice was very low.

"Nothing like that. I'm not going to kill the goose that may lay the golden eggs."

"You mean?"

"Suggestions."

"I see." Campbell rose lazily. "Here is one. Listen, and take it home with you. If you don't like it, bring it back and I'll perhaps exchange it for a better one."

"Well—what is it?" Rollins was hoarse with eagerness.

"I know a young thug," Campbell said very deliberately, "who has murder in his eye for a man he has never seen. That thug is anxious to meet an Englishman named 'Smith' who—killed his brother in London. If the Earl of Didderington were in my way, as he is in yours, I'd be very friendly with him; and then we'd do a little slumming one evening.

"We would go to a place I know near the river, where we should be sure to meet the young man looking for Smith. I'd find an opportunity to talk to that young man for a minute or two, and then I'd go back to my friend, the earl, and wait to watch him die!"

"Good Heavens!"

The exclamation was mine. I started to my feet, while the tables and chairs swarmed about me. I stood gaping down at him. But there was no change in Campbell's expression.

"Of course," he went on, and his head bent forward a little, as if he were interested in something upon the floor near the door, "I told Rollins he would have to arrange it a little differently, but pointed out that it was the safest thing in the world.

"He saw that it was, and took the idea home with him. Later, as I knew he would, he brought it back again, saying he could not use it since he did not know the man who was looking for Smith."

Campbell's interest in the door became more keen, and his head bent lower.

"I said he could become acquainted with my thug for fifty thousand dollars. But he balked on the price, until a month ago when I suggested that you might marry and have children."

Campbell's hand went to the inside pocket of his coat, and when he spoke it was in a whisper of caution.

"That settled it, and we came to terms. Ten thousand when I got you over here; another ten when I introduced him to the man looking for Smith, and the rest—when the job was done!"

"What?"

"Wheesht! He paid the first ten on Monday. Here is my check for it."

And he held out a white slip of paper to me!

CHAPTER XII.

A LOOSE END.

I STARED at the thing and pulled away from it. For a few moments I didn't know whether to laugh or run; and since I couldn't move because I was semiparalyzed, I laughed foolishly.

The whole business seemed so queer and creepy—and silly.

Some one was being made an ass of, and I wasn't at all certain that it was Rollins, even when Campbell thrust the bally thing into my hand, and I saw, in open-mouthed wonder, that it was in truth a check, made out to John T. Mason by R. M. Campbell, for the sum of ten thousand dollars!

"But—good Lord, man!"

"Wheesht! Tak' it. Wha has a better right to the price of your life than you?"

He got upon his feet, crammed his hat upon his head, and pulled the brim down over his eyes.

"Come, and I'll show you the emergency exit. There is the reason. See it?"

My mind struggled valiantly out of a misty haze. The sounds in the barroom seemed suddenly to grow louder. Glancing in the direction Campbell's large index-finger pointed, I saw, fastened to the wall, to the right of the door, a little black box, and, as I looked, a green light came and went twice.

"Jove—that's—"

"Quiet," Campbell cautioned. "Not now. We'll go home."

There was nothing for me to do but follow, though I had no idea of what was up, and as I tiptoed after him it seemed as if every board was yelling out against me, while, in spite of his great bulk, he made scarcely any sound whatever.

Reaching a door in the rear of the room, he turned the key in it noiselessly, and allowed me to pass out into the darkness of a place like a kitchen.

"Wait," he whispered, and I halted while he closed and locked the door, thrusting the key into his pocket.

Then he was at my side, gripping my arm.

"The door is right ahead," he advised in a low monotone. "So when you need it, don't waste valuable time searching for it. Since the case isn't urgent to-night, I'll give you a light."

In a moment there was a slight click, and a single electric bulb showed me that the place was really a kitchen, which, by the look of it, was not often used.

"Andy knows we are gone now," I was told, and I saw that beside the switch was a push-button on which his finger rested.

"What does that do—ring a bell?"

"Hardly. Bells talk too plainly. A little white light under the bar is telling the story, and a certain emissary from a ward politician, who is anxious to know how I feel toward the November election, will wait patiently for an hour or two, helping to swell my profits—"

"Your profits!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Exactly. This place belongs to me. If I didn't take the money from those

fools, they would spend it elsewhere and their dependents would never get it back. But we can't stand here discussing my methods."

And putting out the light without further parley, he half led, half pushed me toward the door, suddenly gripping my hand and thrusting it against the knob, so that my fingers took hold of the thing instinctively.

"Don't turn it—pull it to the right," he instructed. "It can't be opened from the outside except with a key. That's right"—as I pulled the door open—"now we're in the yard."

We passed into the open air, into the midst of gaunt shadows, and the door clicked behind us.

"The gate is on the left, in the upper corner. That's the way to walk right into the street and the other fellow's gun, if it's as bad as that. The other way is to turn to the right to the wire fence; and even if you try to miss it, it won't miss you.

"Creep under it, and keep on until you have gone under one more wire fence and over one rickety board one. The board fence will tell you not to go any farther after you've gotten over it. Then you will be in Brannigan's yard, and you will go up to his back door, walk right in, and if you say 'Gregarach' he'll let you stay.

"He has a little candy-store fronting on Eleventh Avenue, and he lives in the rear of it. There is nothing that you need be afraid of. The two stores between the Clachan and Brannigan's are vacant, and always will be, because I keep them so. I pay rent to myself for them. Think you can remember all that?"

"It is just so much gibberish to me," I expostulated.

"Man—but you're an inquisitive soul. Just tell me now if you can remember two wire fences, one board fence, and Brannigan's back door. Can you?"

"I think so," I answered.

"I hope so, but I'll write it down for you when we get home."

"Home?"

"My home," he answered tersely. "We've got a few things yet to say to each other, and we'll be fairly respectable to-night and go out by the street gate. Doesn't the air feel good—even here?"

He drew a great, deep breath as we passed out into the dimly lit street and headed toward Tenth Avenue; and instantly I marveled at the man's utter disregard for any sort of disguise or concealment. Apparently, he walked about under the noses of the police without a particle of concern for his safety.

"You're a cool beggar!" I declared as we crossed over to the sidewalk.

Campbell laughed and took hold of my arm again.

"Dinna be feart, my mannie," he soothed irritatingly, and continued in a low, cautious tone: "You are safer here with me than you will be in Rollins's place to-morrow. There is a policeman at the corner, too, and if I condescend to notice him he will say 'Good av'nin', sorr,' like a gentleman.

"If you asked him who I was, he would probably tell you that I was a 'quare Scotch gintlemin phwat owns the worrust saloon in Hell's Kitchin, an' is thryin' to turn the place into a sivinth hivin, an' not doin' so bad at that, wit' givin' the force less worruk than it ivir had in thim parrts.' He and his captain may have a thousand suspicions about my connections with a certain company whose methods are like nothing the police has ever had to handle before, and Parks, of the Central Office, may have a thousand more ideas about me.

"But suspicion and evidence are widely different things. Besides, which is more important, they know that Mr. MacGregor can make or unmake any gentleman with political aspirations hereabout—and that Mr. MacGregor has money—oh, lots of money!— I wonder who the lady is?"

A woman had appeared within the light of the few little shops at the

Tenth Avenue corner; she was coming toward us, evidently in a great hurry.

Whether young or old, I could not tell; but my companion's pace slackened, and he seemed to gage his steps so that we would meet her under a lamp-post.

And we did. Campbell came to a full stop, and, of course, I with him. The woman almost collided with us. A foot away she raised her eyes from the ground with the light shining full upon her face.

"Greg—" she began and stopped, as if his look had choked off the rest of it.

There was no hat upon her head. She was young—under twenty-five—a little gaudily but cheaply clothed, and her cheeks were marred by color put on with a too lavish hand.

Evidently she hailed from southern Europe, and her eyes were wonderful—very dark and afraid. She fumbled with her hands, and appeared to await anxiously the Gregarach's observations.

"You were coming to see me?" Campbell asked quietly.

"No, sir."

"Then you were going to confession?"

He turned his head to where, farther down the street, was the Church of Saint—I've forgotten the chap's name.

"No, sir."

"Then we'll take you home," Campbell declared decisively. "Where is Tony?"

"I don' know, sir," the girl whimpered, and sought the support of the lamp-post. "Two week I no' see him."

"I think I can find him," Campbell declared. "And when I do, I'll tell him you came to me and asked me to bring him back to you. How will that do?"

I doubted if the girl understood every word, but she grasped the meaning of the lie better than I, judging by the frightened look that sprang into her eyes. She made no comment, but allowed Campbell to take her arm and lead her back the way she had come.

Of course, I felt out of it completely; but with the check my strange friend had given me burning a hole in my pocket, and a million questions fighting each other for precedence on my tongue, I walked with them, speculating upon what was going to happen next.

Campbell did not speak, nor the girl, nor I. When we reached the corner of Tenth Avenue one of the usual little groups lounging about a saloon-door said "Good evenin', sir," almost in unison, and the policeman, now moving up the street, echoed it in a County Cork accent.

I was not sure during the short walk whether I was standing on the rim of a volcano or walking with a king on parade. But it was apparent before we had gone two squares that in that section he who could claim the friendship of the Gregarach might walk in perfect safety.

The girl ignored me completely as is I were a rank outsider; and when, after going a few squares, Campbell said, "Wait, please," and vanished into an entry, above which was an intimation that one could play pool for two and a half cents per cue, I felt stupid, with a nasty sensation that I should say something to her, yet feared a snub for my pains.

Before I could decide Campbell reappeared with a little man like the bootblack at the hotel.

Expecting a demonstration, yet hoping there wouldn't be one in such a public place, I was really disappointed in the dénouement.

Campbell simply said:

"Tony, your wife isn't very well; so she came to me and asked me to tell you that she wanted you to come back to her. Take her home."

Tony looked from one to the other sheepishly. He was hardly as steady as he might have been, and when he took hold of his wife's arm I thought she would be more likely to take him home.

"A'ri', mister," he mumbled thickly.

"You fina man—yessir. Tony badda man; getta gooda wife. We go."

Tony's wife said nothing, but she shrank from him, and for a moment her eyes met Campbell's.

There was hate in them, and despair and loathing — a queer mixture; the battle of a weakened soul against the inevitable. I would not have cared to have had the venom in it directed at me.

"Good night, Mrs. Varelli," Campbell said softly, and turned and drew me away. We crossed Tenth Avenue and walked up Fifty-Seventh Street.

"Why did you lie to that man?" I asked. "She hates the little beast."

"Aye, she hates him," Campbell admitted broadly—"and with fair reason. He stays away from her for weeks and comes back to her when his money is gone. She works in a factory and supports herself. He is a cheap sort of poolroom thief, whom I've kept out of jail twice, and that is why they respect what I say and make a bluff of being satisfied.

"But there's no gratitude in that little rat. He'll be off again in a week, if not sooner; and some day he'll kill some one and shiver in a condemned cell till they take him out to end a life that began somewhere on the sunny shores of Sicily."

"I suppose so," I agreed. "But that doesn't explain the lie altogether."

"Well, it wouldn't have done if I had told Tony that his wife was on the way to look for Beans Borrowman when I met her."

"The deuce she was!"

"Exactly," Campbell admitted with a trace of annoyance. "And I can't afford to have my lieutenants mixed up with Sicilian carving-knives at this time of the year. Winter is coming on, and that's our busy season."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INTERRUPTION.

BETWEEN Eighth and Ninth Avenues in one of the Fifties, there is a row of brown-stone houses all alike, and into the basement of one of these Campbell led me.

I am careful about the location of the house, because I believe some one has rented it since MacGregor gave it up, and I do not wish the people to be embarrassed in any way.

The neighbor on Campbell's right, so he told me, kept "roomers," having a card in the parlor window to that effect, while the neighbor on the left kept dogs — little, white, woolly beasts—which were bred in the music-room and sold in the parlor.

They were all queer animals who lived in that street, coming out of their houses like winter clothes emerging from among the moth-balls; musty, dusty people, with pasts and presents, and Heaven knows what futures.

So Campbell excited no particular attention.

He had rented the house furnished, he informed me. Beans and the rest knew nothing of his connection with any other establishment or life than that. They knew where he lived, and when people are thoroughly satisfied that they have one's address they do not seem to feel the necessity for searching further.

R. M. Campbell, gentleman at leisure, of Central Park West and several Fifth Avenue clubs, and Robert MacGregor, of Fifty— Street, and the "Clachan of Aberfoyle," were two distinct personalities, though he adopted no disguise except the clothes he wore, and the Scotch accent he affected.

On Fifth Avenue he dressed accordingly. In Fifty— Street, and as the proprietor of a disreputable saloon, his attire created no comment, because it talked loudly enough to silence all argument.

I could understand that quite plainly when he removed his coat. There was no mistaking the language of that screeching check suit or of the great diamond that gleamed beneath a revolutionary tie. The links of his watch-

chain were of the proper size and weight, stretching from pocket to pocket of a waistcoat, which "fancy" does not even hint at.

He carried it all as though to the manner born, with a bluster to which his height and breadth lent emphasis, and his huge, hairy hands gave me a keener understanding of why Batch, the negro, had collapsed so suddenly.

With the shades carefully drawn, and one incandescent burner shedding its light upon us, we sat down in the dining-room.

Apparently there was no one else in the house. A piano across the street played ragtime, accompanied by a chorus of voices in several other keys.

The rumble of the trams and Elevated trains joined in at intervals, and in the lulls we were granted the sound of occasional footsteps could be heard with remarkable distinctness.

Some of the passers-by shuffled along as if their shoes were unlaced, conveying to my mind the vision of a large white pitcher that would be filled at the corner shop. Others brought their feet down sharply, others ambled.

As Campbell turned from the regulation furnished-house sideboard, bearing a bottle and glasses and cigars, which he deposited upon the table, I was going to say something about feet; but instead I pulled the check he had given me from my pocket and laid it down before him.

"That," I said deliberately, "has got to have a proper explanation before I will have anything to do with it. You have been very liberal with just enough information to make me uncomfortable, and I object to being Smith, even for fifty thousand dollars. A lot of good the fifty would do me if that chap Beans sent me out!"

Campbell made up two high-balls—so he called them—and slid the cigars nearer to me. The check he ignored completely.

"Chin-chin," he said listlessly, and raised his glass.

I nodded and we drank.

"It's a pity that little political man interrupted us at the Clachan, Campbell; but there are two things I've kept my hands clear of—machine politics and murder. I don't know which is worse. Take up the check. It's yours since it is in part payment for your life."

"But, man alive—"

"It's strange, I'll admit, but if you'll look at it this way it won't seem so indefinite. You know what Rollins wants, and perhaps you have gathered that I have no intention of letting him have it. If I had I would not have got Sysonsby to tell you that pretty little story he did—you remember?"

"That was your idea?"

"I apologize for the hackneyed nature of it. In fact, I thought it too raw altogether, but you helped us wonderfully by talking of Rollins without a lead of any sort. You were very easy. But do you think that if I wanted to have you killed I'd choose your friends to conspire with?"

"I suppose not. How much of what you've told me does Sysonsby know?"

"Nothing. He believes it is simply a trick to bring the two branches of your family together again—with a possible romance at the end of it. I want to hire your services for a few weeks, for which I am willing to pay the amount of the mortgage on the lodge—"

"Using Rollins's money—what?"

"No, man—no—my money. Rollins's fifty thousand is going into an up-town bank to make life real to some one I know, and I'll make it worth double that to you if you'll assist me get it away from him."

"Hang it all, man! You speak as if I was a chum of *Bill Sikes*. Don't you realize that the thing is theft?"

"I never steal," Campbell said quietly. "I collect debts. My boys are paid a weekly salary and a commission on their collections just like the collectors for any other charitable

organization. Mine are a little better paid, perhaps, because their work is a little more dangerous.

"If I did not employ them they could employ themselves promiscuously and get into trouble. It is in their blood—a clot on the brain—and all I do is to direct their endeavors in a sort of justifiable channel. People who give need never be afraid of getting one of our calling-cards.

"But Rollins and his kind, who play *Scrooge* from year's beginning to year's end, are always likely to hear from us, and the louder they squeal the better we like it, and the oftener we call.

"Every man owes a certain percentage of his income to the man who has less—and we simply collect what the fortunate owes the unfortunate—and won't pay. Since the debtor in this case happens to be Rollins, I intend to collect, even if the cost of collection is double the debt. The price is your affair."

It was a quaint argument of the sort that would readily command sympathy, particularly among the "unfortunate," who are appallingly in the majority. I did not argue the point, but asked after a short pause:

"How am I to help if I don't know what I am to do? And what reason have you to suppose that I won't cash this check and go off somewhere in the night? I could, very easily, you know, since you can't possibly go to law about it."

"And there you have Rollins's position exactly," Campbell declared at once. "He can't make any fuss about his fifty, and any he does make will be made to me. You do not enter into the matter actively at all.

"All you have to do shall be to play the part of Mr. Mason — Campbell's friend — and accept Rollins's invitation to go slumming when it comes. I'll take care of the rest."

"But you don't suppose I would go into a thing like this without knowing what is actually going to happen?"

"Nothing will happen—at least, not to you. You will leave the Clachan as I directed you to-night, and you'll do it when a red lights shows in that signal lamp you saw. Rollins won't be with you at the time. He will be at the bar telling Crabbe about Smith."

"Crabbe!"

"Crabbe — spelled with two 'b's' and an 'e.' He will misunderstand Rollins thoroughly."

"And what is going to happen to Rollins?"

"That does not concern you."

"I'm afraid it does. He may be all kinds of a rotter, but I am hanged if I will be a party to anything of that sort."

"What sort?" the question was very quiet.

"You know what I mean."

"You have forgotten that I drove that taxi to-night. Do you think I would soil my hands with Margaret's father's blood?"

"I suppose not," I stammered.

Campbell's eyebrows fell suddenly, and he peered at me from under them in keen interrogation.

"Man—but ye have a poor opeenion o' my intelligence. If I ever want to kill a man I'll no' pit my guilt on the end o' anither's tongue and risk it waggin' in State's evidence against me. Na, na, man; dinna fash yersel' aboot Rollins farin' weel or ill. Are ye no' far enough intae an ugly business without wantin' tae gang farther?"

I got upon my feet slowly.

"Yes, I'm afraid I've gone too far into a very ugly business. Your motives may be excellent, and this chap Rollins may deserve a jolly good hiding, but I can't possibly take his money that way.

"Oh, yes, it's his!" I continued, as he seemed likely to protest. "Paying me over your name is only a subterfuge — I mean — it doesn't alter the thing in my eyes a bit. Of course, everything you've told me is perfectly safe with me, and I have to thank you

for one of the most interesting evenings of my life.

"In fact, I hate like the dickens to drop out, as I'd like, from sheer inquisitiveness, to know why you began this sort of thing, and how you manage to keep out of jail. But it's quite impossible for me to—"

The basement bell suddenly interrupted me.

Campbell sprang to his feet.

"Wheest! That's Della!" he whispered, and moved toward the door leading to the hall.

"Della?" I queried blankly.

He stopped and turned his head.

"I beg your pardon—Miss Borrowman—my wife—to be."

CHAPTER XIV.

DELLA AND THE GOBBLER.

He left me standing gaping at the door, and it was then, while I awaited his return, that I had my first suspicion that he was not quite right in the head.

A chap like him marrying—

The scuffle of feet in the hall interrupted my thoughts, and, seeing the check upon the table, I seized it and stuffed it into my pocket. In an instant more the door was flung open, and a girl, scarcely more than a child, came into the room.

Campbell followed her directly.

For a moment the newcomer and I regarded each other in mute surprise. I haven't the least idea of what she thought of me, but there is no question about what I thought of her.

From under a light silk shawl one received a hint of the jet-black crown of her hair that was so wonderful under the lamplight—or any light, for that matter.

Her features were small, but she was not so pretty as she was compelling. One looked at her once, twice, and then a third time to make sure one's first impression was correct; and each time one passed lightly over the mouth, chin, and nose—all right in their way—to study the remarkable deep blue of her eyes and the equally remarkable inky-black eyebrows that o'ershadowed them.

She was prettily clothed in a manner that did not stifle the round lines of her lithe, young figure, and gave no indication of her relationship to the Borrowman tribe — and then, in that moment when I looked for her to smile in conjunction with the inevitable introduction, she turned her head sharply and glanced up into Campbell's face.

"Who's this guy?"

The tone, harshly imperative, and the final word dissipated everything. A cold shiver ran down my spine.

"The gentleman is my friend—Mr. Mason," Campbell replied gravely without winking an eyelash, and inclined his head toward me. "Mr. Mason, allow me to introduce you to my *fiancée*—Miss Borrowman."

I bowed.

"Charmed to meet Miss Borrowman. May I offer my congratulations?"

The girl's eyes came round upon me slowly. Her body did not move; just her head.

"You're English, ain't you?"

Judging by her tone, my nationality was a crime; but I admitted it.

"Huh! All right. If the Gregarach's satisfied, it ain't up to me to lose any sleep about it."

Her hand searched for the back of Campbell's chair as she sized me up, and when she found it she crept round it slowly.

"I'm tired, Mac—played out. The Gobbler ain't giv' me a chanst for a snooze in forty hours. Gee! — but kids is the limit when they git goin'."

She dropped limply and suddenly into the chair. Campbell was at her side, bending over her in a moment, and it did not strike me as being humorous when he got down upon a knee and took possession of her hands.

"Poor little girl! I'm sorry. It's too much for you, isn't it?"

His voice softened and his manner became fatherly.

"No, it ain't too much," the girl answered, and, in spite of my presence, her head sneaked nearer to his shoulder. "But I was worried stiff las' night, thinkin' he was sure goin' to holler hisself into kingdom come afore mornin'. I guess he had a pain somewheres, and, as he ain't able to say where, he just opens his face and lets it rip. He was sleepin' w'en I left."

"But the nurse—couldn't she—"

"I fired her yes'day mornin'," Della interrupted disgustedly, and Campbell's mouth twisted as if he wanted to laugh, but did not dare to. "She didn't do nothin' I couldn't get by with myself, and I guessed you could use the little fifty a mont' some ways else. Nessie wouldn't of stood for it. You know she wouldn't. She'd 'a' took the Gobbler and beat it somewheres — and woiked for him — an' she'd never have let a man that ain't—"

"Della!" The warning was low. I saw the girl search Campbell's face affrightedly. His expression was a little harder.

"I forgot," Della pleaded. "I wussent to say that again — but — but"—her attention was riveted suddenly upon me—"what's he hangin' aroun' for? If he's spieled his little piece, why don't he beat it?"

Campbell nodded to me and smiled.

"Mr. Mason is going to call upon the Gobbler with me—when we take you home to-night."

"He is—eh?" Again I came under the censorship of those great blue eyes. "What's your graft? You a new member?"

Campbell laughed softly while I looked foolish.

"Mr. Mason is not a new member," my host answered for me. "But he is almost as anxious to find Smith as we are, and will be pleased to meet the Gobbler on that account."

"Gee!"

Della scrutinized me thoroughly this time, as if she were searching for the cause of my antipathy to Smith.

"Say—if you lamp him first put me wise, will you? I'd do the same for you."

The eagerness of the question and the evident genuineness of her offer kept my face straight, and I nodded. The little hard lines about her mouth softened instantly.

"Is that on the level?"

"On the level," I answered, and felt a twinge of conscience, since I knew very well I should never keep my promise.

Smothering a smile, Campbell glanced at his watch and rose.

"Twelve o'clock and all's well," he announced sonorously. "And now that there is a bond of understanding between you, we shall cement it with a glimpse of the Gobbler. May we be permitted to spend money on a taxi, Miss Economy?"

Della looked up quickly.

"Not on your life. I didn't fire that noice so's we could ride roun' in buzz-wagons. I jus' seen the receip' for the rent yes'day, an', gee, I a'most choked! The agen' handed it to me by mistake. Seven'y-five bucks a mont'—an' I knows famblies what's livin' on eight per.

"All them glad rags me an' the Gobbler's gotta wear, too, must ha' stood you up for a pile o' rocks. Ev'ry time I pipe a hock-shop I gotta hit the high places to keep from slippin' in to see what I could raise on them. I feel like a walkin' meal-ticket for a dozen o' them poor guys in the bread-line, an' I jus' hate to have the little sawn-off what sells pencils at the foot o' the 'L' station stairs lamp me as I blow by."

"That's all right, little girl," said Campbell gently. "We'll forego the extravagance of a taxi and take the 'L.'"

"Already! I ain't been here a minute."

"And you haven't slept for forty hours," Campbell reminded her.

Her long black lashes swept swiftly upward; but, as there was no surrender in the quiet authority of Campbell's expression, her hand went out undecidedly to the lowest button on his coat.

"I—I don't care about that now," she said in a very low voice. "I ain't seen you but once in a mont', an'—an'—"

I smiled, bowed, took the hint and my hat, and went out. But I caught a glimpse of Campbell's face as I passed.

He did not look happy.

I waited for them at the outer door, wondering. I could not explain it, however, and, in any case, a chap should never attempt to explain another fellow's matrimonial intentions.

Of course, I guessed who the "Gobbler" was—the dead Borrowman girl's baby—and in those few minutes I was tempted to fly from the whole thing. But I stayed.

Generally speaking, inquisitiveness was probably my principal reason for doing so; and I believed Campbell's story the more upon remembering that Rollins had spoken of introducing me to the slums.

But, even with that memory in evidence against him, I laughed at the idea of the little beast wanting to murder me! The thing wasn't of the twentieth century at all.

I thought it would be in perfect keeping if I ran off with his daughter.

Campbell and his *fiancée* joined me in a very little while, cutting short my cogitation, and on the journey uptown I studied them both in a careful way, observing that the girl was watching me closely, though she asked no questions.

That the Gregarach had vouched for me was apparently enough, and it was very evident that she loved him. It showed sometimes when she looked up into his face, and in the way she snuggled near to him like a tired child and held surreptitiously to the great little finger of his left hand.

I had a suspicion he had lectured her in the few minutes I had left them alone. She seemed chastened and did not speak all the way to One Hundred and Tenth Street.

So long as she kept silent one would never have suspected her origin or the latent savagery that smoldered behind the childlike simplicity of her face.

We were an odd trio, totally disparate in our outlook upon life; but in a pink-and-white bedroom in an elevator apartment-house on Cathedral Parkway, to which Della led us as if she were ashamed to live there, we came very near to each other mentally round the crib of the Gobbler.

He was a splendid little chap, fast asleep, holding on to the neck of his bottle like grim death, while something like a smile hovered in the corners of his baby mouth.

I liked the Gobbler at once without a second's hesitation, and for a while watched him breathe, as if it were the most remarkable thing in the world.

Of course, I was sorry for him—poor, nameless little chap—and had Rollins come into the room then I would surely have thrashed him, even at the risk of waking the Gobbler.

And as I looked down upon him, nestling so snugly amid the downy whiteness of his pillows, and quite unconscious of the fact that both Campbell and Della were eying me very closely, I had a sudden understanding of why I had been brought to see him.

Looking up, I found Della's eyes upon me, then Campbell's.

"The fifty thousand," I whispered to the latter, "is for—him?"

Campbell inclined his head, while Della, glancing interrogatively at us both, showed plainly that she did not understand.

The Gobbler stirred, and his little fingers, loosening their hold upon the bottle, slid beneath the covers. Della bent over him instantly, neither touching him nor making any sound—just watching.

I looked toward Campbell again, and found him smiling; and, obeying a slight movement of his head, tiptoed after him into the hall and to the living-room.

"Well?"

The monosyllable needed no explanation. I pulled the check from my pocket.

"All right—but just for fun, you know. You can tear that up and make out a new one—for the Gobbler."

He took the check, folded it carefully, and slipped it into one of the pockets of that hideous waistcoat of his.

"You must be of the fifth generation," he said with a whimsical smile, and held out his hand.

My fingers tingled with the pressure of his.

CHAPTER XV.

LOSING NO TIME.

CURIOUSLY enough, I slept soundly that night.

For a little while I turned things over in my mind, wondering where I would land; and then I started up in response to the appearance of a red light in the signal-lamp beside the Clachan's barroom door—and almost fell out of bed.

But now that I can view the matter sanely, I marvel at how little it affected me at the time. The element of adventure appealed to me; and I think one's mind can adapt itself quite cheerfully to almost any condition of affairs.

But I shrank from lunching with Rollins at his club the following day, and when he offered his hand I could have struck him.

Yet I took it, remembering where we were and my promise.

His fingers were like ice, and I thought his eyes were even more shifty than usual. When he talked I expected him at any moment to declare himself, but he didn't just then.

I began to notice little things that had escaped my attention before, and not one of them made me like him any better. He bullied the waiter in a sneaking sort of way, and smirked and squinted out of the corners of his eyes at the people round about.

His conversation driveled and arrived nowhere. It bored me insufferably, so that I prayed he would find an evening suitable for my "demise" very soon. Once or twice I almost suggested one.

It was a considerable relief to get away from him for the afternoon; but when I reached my hotel more trouble awaited me in the form of a small package accompanied by a note; literally "just a line."

> Please make as much as you can for —us. Smith & Nelson, Broad Street, will take the commission on a ten-point margin.
>
> MARGARET.

Us!

I felt peculiarly soothed, pleasantly conscious that I was no longer alone in the world; and it occurred to me that I must have been terribly lonely—yesterday, even though I hadn't noticed it particularly.

The jewels gave me a chill. Margaret must have collected everything in the line of jewelry that she owned for me to pawn. There were several rings; plain gold and diamond-studded bracelets, pearls and other neck adornments, and a tiara sort of thing.

I had no idea of their worth, but I locked my doors and pulled the shades, and in miserlike gloom contemplated Margaret's brilliant toys, striving to believe that it would be quite proper for me to pawn them.

The effort was not successful; yet I realized that if I did not do as she asked she would be sure to raise the dickens, and that I could not take advantage of her tip if I deprived her, by my squeamishness, of the chance to make many thousands of dollars.

I spent a rather miserable Sunday afternoon, noting the addresses of several "uncles" who might accommo-

date me; it being borne upon me that it would not be advisable to take everything to one shop, as the pawnbroker would be sure to think I had stolen them.

When Rollins called for me that evening to introduce me to the interior of a Fifth Avenue church, I had the stuff nicely arranged and my itinerary for the following day carefully mapped out.

I can't tell you anything about that church; and the proper time to see Fifth Avenue on Sunday, as every one knows, is after the morning service, when it vies with Solomon and the lily combined, and looks like the pages of the fashion magazines out for a walk.

My mind sacrilegiously was too busy elsewhere, and half the time I was studying Rollins's piously intent expression, which declared that the sermon, for him, was a very serious matter.

As I walked with him to his club afterward, he declared that it was a pleasant relief, in the midst of so much evidence of the mean and ugly, to get away from it all for an hour and two and listen to a good man speak of higher things.

"Usually," he continued, "my daughter accompanies me every Sunday morning, but she did not feel quite equal to it to-day. In fact, while I was lunching with you, she fainted. She is not very strong, poor child."

"Oh, I'm sorry," I sympathized. "I hope it is nothing serious."

"I hope not," Rollins declared, shaking his head dolefully. "But a parent's anxiety has no end, Mason—no end. Fortunately, my daughter's future is pleasantly assured, but I would like to see her gaining strength. Poor little girl, she is so fond of me, and she appreciates how much it hurts me to find her so pale and indifferent to the lighter side of life."

"Perhaps I am detaining you," I suggested hopefully, as we approached the entrance to the club. "I am sure you would rather—"

"No—no—it isn't as bad as that, you know," he assured me hurriedly. "She will very likely be all right in the morning. Let's go in and talk for a while."

We went into the smoking-room—to a quiet corner of it—and talked—or at least he did—until I was bored to the yawning point. No one came near us, and I imagined that Rollins could find seclusion almost anywhere. There was something about him, apart from his eyes and his cravats, that repelled; the sort of something dogs and babies don't like in a man.

Then, as I was on the verge of proposing an adjournment, apropos of nothing at all, he said:

"We have something in the city which is rather unique."

"Yes? What is that?"

"Organized theft. Didn't you read of that case in Yonkers a few days ago?"

He did not look at me as he spoke, and my surprise might have been quite natural.

"No. What was it?"

"The Rob Roy gang, which has been famous in New York for nearly two years, left its card upon a man named Berman, after opening his safe like a match-box and taking everything worth while out of it."

"Is that so? Rather cheeky—what?"

"Cheeky!" he exclaimed indignantly. "It is more grave than mere impertinence. It is a blot upon the city and a sneer at the police and what they represent. No householder can consider himself safe while those parasites remain at large. I've studied them, and I know them. I've gone down into their filthy dens and looked them over from head to foot."

He appeared to be very much concerned.

"You must have done quite a lot of slumming," I suggested. "Interesting, isn't it?"

I knew that was terribly raw, but I hate to see a man beating about the

bush, particularly if the thing he is looking for isn't in the bush at all, but out in the open.

"Quite," he conceded. "But filthy—very filthy. I was speaking to a man I used to meet in Hell's Kitchen—his name is Crabbe—and he told me that the particularly vile saloon I used to study types in is still in existence in that neighborhood. And I understand that this Rob Roy gang frequents that quarter.

"Crabbe said he would possibly be down there Wednesday evening, and that he would vouch for our safety, if you cared to look over the district that is considered to be quite as debased as Whitechapel."

He stopped there, waiting for some response to the invitation, and I felt a cold shiver run through me. I don't know whether he noticed it or not, but I sidled away from him as if he were not quite clean. Then, somehow, I caught at a hint of humor in the business, and for a few moments, in sheer devilment, I held my peace, watching him squirm upon the rack of uncertainty, while he seemed afraid to look into my face in case he might find refusal there.

"What is this chap—this Crabbe?" I asked carefully.

"Well"—a sickly smile and an uncertain movement of the hand—"that is—to tell the truth, I'd rather not say. But I fancy he knows what a warden looks like."

"That makes him an interesting person. Wednesday evening, did you say?"

Rollins's face cleared instantly.

"Yes—Wednesday. We'll dine here and go right down afterward. How will that do?"

"I am at your disposal, sir."

He smiled, signed to a waiter, and, ordering "two more," was positively cheerful for the remainder of the evening, the anxieties of fatherhood seeming to have completely slipped his memory.

But, then, it isn't every man who can arrange two "killings" to come off on the same day — Rand Island's and mine!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT NOSPIM'S.

I WAS uncertain on Monday morning whether I was fortunate or unfortunate in having the forenoon to myself.

Rollins was unpleasant to have about one, but the idea of bearding several pawnbrokers in their dens was still more so. However, I sallied forth bravely.

Out of some five millions of people, probably a dozen knew me, yet I dilly-dallied about the doors of the first shop, fearful that I would be seen and recognized as I went in; and when I did enter the place I am sure I wore a hunted look, because I felt as if half the police of the city were after me.

There were a man and a woman waiting at a pigeonholed window, over which was printed "Pledges." I joined them and was scrutinized from head to foot in one glance that gave me the impression that I intruded.

The man had thrust a watch and some other trifles through the pigeonhole, and was anxiously—hungrily, in fact — watching the clerk examine them.

"Fifteen dollars," the latter announced in an inflectionless voice.

"Eh?"

"Fifteen dollars."

"Gee! An' I need—can't you make it—"

"Fifteen dollars."

There was no change in the clerk's tone or expression, but that of the man who owned the things underwent lightninglike alterations. Surprise gave way to annoyance, annoyance to indecision, indecision to a hang-dog look of resignation. His shoulders seemed to droop a little, his chin and his knees to sag. There wasn't any life to his mumbled "All right."

When he received his check for the cash, payable at the cashier's window, the woman took his place. She was a large-boned, capable person—had a locket with some diamonds in it—and fixed the clerk with a militant eye as he examined the stones through his jeweler's glass.

"Fifty dollars."

"Huh! Nothin' doin'. I want seven'y-five. Them di-minds ain't the stage kind, sonny."

"If they were, madam, I could possibly loan more than you ask. Next, please."

"You're the fresh guy, ain't you?" the woman almost screeched, her face going red as a beet. "You're a gentleman, you are, insultin' a lady as ain't got no brothers or a husband to come down an' knock your block off. You think 'cause you gotta piece o' plate-glass protectin' your ugly mug as you can hand out any line o' talk. What chanst has a woman in this town when little, hammered-down—"

The clerk pressed a button near at hand and a buzzer was heard somewhere behind the partition.

"Next, please."

The woman's flow of language ceased. She seemed undecided, and the locket still lay where the clerk pushed it out to her. She thrust it back again slowly. No one answered the buzzer.

"Fifty's your limit, heh?"

"Fifty is our limit, madam."

"I got seven'y-five—"

"Fifty dollars, madam, or nothing."

The militant attitude departed, and a sulky one took its place.

"Gimme fifty."

It is always that way.

I started off with the pendant.

"Let me have what you can on that, please."

The clerk took it, glanced questioningly at me and departed.

At once I imagined he was going to telephone to the police or something like that. A cold perspiration broke out upon my forehead, and I stood first upon one foot then the other, painting mental pictures of myself being taken down Broadway handcuffed to a policeman, with a mob of small boys and others trailing behind. And just as I had hit upon a fairly respectable lie, the fellow appeared again.

"We can loan you twelve hundred on this if you want that much."

"Thanks. A thousand will do."

I thought that was rather clever. It disarmed suspicion at once. The pendant vanished; a cash-slip and the ticket took its place.

"At the cashier's window, sir."

Just as I had been afraid to come in I was equally afraid to go out; but I did it, and went on to the second place, which was Nospim's, the shop Margaret had recommended.

This time I did not hesitate, but rushed the citadel with a determined, businesslike air, not giving any one a chance to know what I was after. The line was a little longer there, but I finally got to the window and tried two rings, and again the clerk departed and returned.

I got seven hundred and fifty for the two.

Going out, I took a squint at my list of addresses, and a yard or two from the pawn-shop door some one suddenly walked by my side and did not go away. Turning my head quickly I encountered the deep blue eyes of Della!

"Why—"

She smiled, and there was a sort of admiration in the look she gave me.

"Gee! You got a gall!"

I raised my hat nervously and instinctively moved further away from the pawn-shop.

"How are you? This is an unexpected pleasure!"

The girl made no reply to that, but took hold of my arm in the most natural way—as if she had been engaged to me for years, you know—and we had gone several yards before I realized that she had assumed complete charge of me.

"You ain't no piker," she declared, while I was wondering whether I should ask her how she came to be there. "My dope on Englishmen wuz that they wuz mushy. You may look it, but I gotta tip my lid to any guy what hit's Nospim's wit' grafted goods and gets away wit' it."

She spoke very quietly, and the roar of Broadway muffled it to all but me.

"With what sort of goods?"

"Aw, I'm wise. You can't play no Santa Claus wit' me. I quit bein' fooled afore my stockin' wuz big 'nough to hold anythin'. I ain't asked you where you grabbed it, have I?"

"Grabbed— Good Heavens! You don't suppose I—"

I stopped. Della's eyes and mine met for a moment or two.

"Can that," she said quietly at last. "Did you soak Nospim's wit' the bunch? Or is that hunk o' somethin' what's bumpin' my fifth rib some more?"

She was clinging very tightly to my arm, and the case containing the necklace was in my coat-pocket on that side; but her deduction flabbergasted me.

"You're the rawest I ever seen," she informed me before I could frame a reply to her question. "Mebbe that's how you get by. You don't look as if you'd have noive 'nough to stick up a guy wit' gout in both feet. But I guess you were wise 'nough to go slow wit' Nospim's. What you got lef'?"

It was plain that argument was useless, and Broadway was no place for a discussion of that sort, and since I could not explain why I had been to Nospim's, I had to suffer in silence.

"You were shopping, I suppose?" I asked in an effort to change the subject.

Della studied me again, this time with a trace of hostility.

"Sure — I wuz shoppin'," she agreed. "I wuz down at a hardware store buyin' dumb-bells for the Gobbler. But if you don' mind we'll strike the 'sub' somewhere's an' beat it uptown. I ain't got all mornin' to see the sights wit' you. Thoity-Thoid's nearest."

"But, Miss Borrowman, I—"

"Cut out the molasses. We're goin' to a safe place. Got me?"

"We are what?"

"You've got it," she said dryly, and plunged me into the maelstrom of traffic at Thirty-Fourth Street so suddenly that there was nothing for it but to go on to prevent us both from being killed.

Reaching the opposite curb alive, I made bold to ask:

"Do you mind telling me where you are taking me to?"

"Hold your horses an' you'll see," she replied, and took a still firmer grip of my arm.

For a little while I "held my horses," and we walked up Thirty-Fourth Street at a fair pace.

There was, as before, no fault to find with Della's clothes. She was the target for many eyes, and I suppose some of the men envied me.

Nearing Fifth Avenue I asked as mildly as possible:

"You saw me go into Nospim's?"

"Sure I seen you. What'd you think I was there for?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAFE PLACE.

A SHAFT of light penetrated the darkness instantly.

"You mean that Mac—" I began.

"Gee, but you're the little wiseheimer!" Della interrupted, and treated me to a look of wonderful scorn. "It's got through, has it?"

I admitted that it had, partly.

"He guessed you wouldn't have the noive to rush Nospim's," she explained, answering the puzzled expression I wore. "Said as I'd most likely find you hangin' roun' outside tryin' to look as you were bein' stood up by your wife.

"But you put one over on Mac that

time. An' on me, too. You don' look the part, buh-lieve me."

I floundered about mentally for a bit, then inquired with some hesitation:

"He didn't tell you where I—got it?"

"Didn't tell me nothin' 'cep' you'd strike Nospim's roun' ten; an' I wuz jus' gettin' mad w'en you blew aroun' the corner."

"Oh, I see. Then I owe you an apology for keeping you waiting. Really, he ought to be more explicit with his instructions."

"He should, eh?" Della bristled instantly. "I guess Mac don' need to take no tips from you. You wuz tol' to make Nospim's at ten, wuzzent you?"

"Er — eh — yes — something like that," I had to admit.

"Well, ain't that 'nough for any guy what can tell the time?"

The remainder of the way to the subway was covered in silence, and we traveled to One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street in much the same frame of mind.

Clearly, so far as Della was concerned, "Mac's" methods were above reproach, and she regarded my casual criticism in the light of an impertinence not readily to be condoned.

I felt properly squelched when we reached the doors of the "safe place," which was not a hundred miles from Harlem's Broadway, and which surprised me very much in that it was just like any other pawn-shop, and much better in general appearance than most.

I read the sign in amazement:

THE HARLEM LOAN CO.

Robert Mack Proprietor

With my hand on the door-knob I queried in a low tone:

"This is—*his?*"

"Search me," Della returned enigmatically, and added: "I don't need to go in. Jus' plant the stuff, grab the coin, and beat it. They won' ask no questions."

I entered gingerly, and finding no other customer in the place, approached the pledge-window at once.

A young man, brisk and business-like, appeared. There was nothing about him to distinguish him from any of the host of New York's young men who make an eighteen-dollar, ready-made suit look worth fifty.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

Tone and manner quite respectful; nothing in his face to indicate the things I thought.

"I have some things here—rather valuable, you know—that I should like to raise a loan on. I believe you can accommodate me?"

"Certainly. Let me have the articles and I will appraise their value and loan you what I can on them."

The necklace, the bracelets, two more rings, and the tiara passed through the pigeonhole in succession; and the clerk vanished as the others had done, to return in a little while with the question:

"I suppose you wish to borrow upon those to the limit?"

"Yes—might as well. I'll be back for them on Thursday, I fancy."

I thought I saw his lips twitch, but the smile got no farther than that.

"Four thousand dollars," he intimated quietly. "How will you take it?"

I told him, and he paid it out to me very carefully. As I put it away in my pocketbook I looked for the ticket.

"Don't I get some sort of receipt?"

"Not on—large quantities," he replied without the shadow of a smile. "I'll know you *when* you come back."

"You have my name on the things, I hope?"

"Yes—Mr. Mason."

That was conclusive. My name until that moment had not been mentioned.

As I moved toward the door it was pushed open and the head and shoulders of a policeman appeared. I stopped short and felt a chilly numbness seize me.

"Say, Jimmie, that clock you got's on the blink! It's dropped four minutes since yes'day."

"Tell it to the telegraph company," Jimmie retorted easily. "How's the lady?"

"Gettin' on fine. That doctor's all right. The wife ain't scared o' him, neither. She asted me to say as she was grateful to Mack for sendin' him up. Where is Mack? I ain't seen him in a mont' o' Sundays."

"He gets round every day for an hour or two," Jimmie answered. "He'll be glad to hear about your wife. Don't block up the doorway."

"Excuse me," the policeman apologized, opening the door wider for me to pass out. "S'long, Jimmie! I'll tell the blonde at the soda fountain you was askin' for her."

Jimmie encouraged the officer to do so, and I made my exit in the latter's wake, trying to appreciate all the originality in the idea of a thief playing "fence" to himself. I was not at all clear upon the efficacy or profit-realizing power of the arrangement, but contented myself with the conclusions that, doubtless, Campbell knew what he was about.

I looked around for Della.

She had gone.

That evening found me at the Van Huysens's; we were a smaller party than before. Campbell was not there; he was understood to be out of town, and Rollins, with the weight of paternal cares upon his tongue, intimated that Margaret was "not at all well," and that it would probably be several days before she could venture out with safety.

I glanced across at Alice as he spoke, and found her studiously looking the other way; later, I think she proposed some music simply because it took her out of the drawing-room. Because I thought so I deliberately took my stand beside the piano, turning the music for her and evidently surprising her by performing the duty at the right time.

"You know music, Mr.—Mason?" she asked, gathering courage while she searched for a second piece.

"Enough to know the notes go up and down," I answered, squinting through the parted portières into the drawing-room, where my hostess, Rollins, and Ralph were engaged in an apparently earnest conversation. "Mr. Campbell plays and sings rather well, don't you think?"

"I suppose so."

Very dryly, as if she were too little interested in the gentleman to bother about anything he did.

"We have heard him so often, I'm afraid we've neglected to appreciate his talents. You are enjoying your visit, I hope?"

"Very much, thanks. So far it has been very interesting."

Her face was turned away, but, in pretense of looking more closely at the piece of music she had selected, I leaned a little nearer to her.

"Do you mind telling me if you know anything of your butler's antecedents?"

Her head came round quickly at the question.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I've seen him before somewhere, and I'm afraid he has a better memory than I have."

Contrary to my expectations, Alice showed no trace of alarm. She simply smiled.

"That might be awkward," she said, and placed the second offering on the music-rest. "But there isn't much danger. Randor is a friend of mine."

"Her fingers ran lightly over the keys.

"Randor?" I repeated. "That sounds familiar."

"Does it? You used to play cricket quite a lot, didn't you?"

"Cricket? Jove! Just a second.

Yorkshire—no. Wor—no; it wasn't there, either. Maryle—that's it! M. C. C. Randor used to run things at the M. C. C. clubhouse. How did you think I'd remember that way?"

"Because the Marylebone Cricket Club's recommendation is, I think, Randor's only conceit. Turn the page, please."

"Sorry. Better play a little louder, hadn't you? You don't think Randor would give me away, then?"

"He would be sure to tell me first if he did."

"Really? You're sure of that?"

"Quite. Here is Uncle Theodore coming to find out what we are talking about. He's been terribly suspicious lately."

Her eyes did not stray from the music or her fingers miss a note; but Rollins was at my side a few moments later, asking me what was my favorite selection. He clung to me every moment for the remainder of the evening.

In his car on the way home, suddenly assuming a confidential air, he asked, with a poor show of hesitation:

"You were rather—impressed—by my niece?"

I tried not to show my surprise at the interrogation.

"I must confess I was. Why?"

"Oh, nothing! No importance, really. She has a very engaging personality—what?"

"I think so."

Rollins laughed in an unpleasant fashion.

"You know, Mason, I've seen men lean upon that piano before while she played."

"Doubtless. That does not surprise me."

"And they've all, more or less, taken to—poetry."

"Sorry I must prove the rule. I couldn't write a line if I tried."

"That's good," he commended, and the sneer that followed was not thickly clothed. "Because, so far, all the effusions have gone into the fire—including Campbell's."

He actually took pleasure in telling me a thing like that.

Rollins was a mean little rat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE VISITORS' GALLERY.

APPROXIMATELY, my partner and I were worth ten thousand five hundred dollars, and on Tuesday morning Rand Island was quoted at 85.

Before lunch I had sufficient intelligence to slip down-town and, finding, as Margaret had said, that Smith & Nelson, Broad Street, would accept ten thousand dollars of United States currency and do business with me on a ten-per-cent margin, I managed to eat with Rollins at half past twelve, with a piece of paper in my pocketbook stating that one thousand shares of Rand Island had been bought for my account at 87.

I had given no selling orders.

Thinking it would be rather nice to make enough to clear the mortgage on the lodge—with Rollins at my elbow—I told him in a casual way that I should like to see Wall Street in action.

"Why, of course," he agreed at once. "Peculiar how a man belittles what has become common to him. I never thought of it. If I am not mistaken, there will possibly be a little fun on the floor to-morrow, and, if you like, I'll give you a glimpse of the exchange from the visitors' gallery. I may be rather busy, but there is usually enough happening on the floor to keep a stranger interested."

And as we rode down into the cañon-like financial district on Wednesday morning, with the newspapers quoting Rand Island at 90, I found the situation at least three thousand dollars funnier than it had been the day before.

From the gallery of the New York Stock Exchange one can look down upon men who probably represent more money than any other group in the world.

But they don't like that in the least.

I thought they were brokers' clerks at first until Rollins, who had piloted me past the doorkeeper, told me that every man on the floor was a member; and, with his chest out, added that the cheapest "seat" had sold for forty-eight thousand dollars, while the majority had cost twice as much.

There was nothing particularly "large" in the atmosphere, the biggest things about the place being the great "blackboards" set into the right and left walls, which signal to members by electrically displaying their seat numbers that they are wanted at the telephone.

The floor was strewn with papers—square-cut slips mostly—and sprinkled generously with water to keep down the dust. Boys in blue-gray uniforms scurried hither and thither, without any apparent objective, while members either lounged about the several posts, answered calls or threw things—words, peanuts, and paper pellets—at one another.

Some one beneath the gallery was courting laryngitis shouting something or other at "thirty-eight thousand."

There were half a dozen men standing within six inches of him, paying not the slightest heed, and he finally ceased yelping, chucked a handful of white, square-cut slips at no head in particular, and strolled aimlessly up the floor with his hands deep in his pockets, not seeming to care a rap whether any one took any interest in his "thirty-eight thousand" or not.

"Those are the bond men," Rollins informed me, referring to the gentlemen under the gallery. "Bonds are very slow just now. But I think if you wait a little while, and watch post No. 3, there will be a stir of some sort. When you get tired take a stroll down to the curb-market. I'll meet you downstairs about one."

As he went out I wondered if he were going to appear on the floor personally, but almost before he had turned the corner toward the lift I heard a staccato voice call:

"Ninety-five for any part of ten thousand Rand Island!"

Turning my head, I found that men all over the floor were directing their attentions toward post No. 3, which had suddenly awakened into a semblance of activity, with a big, broad-faced man in the center of it looking about him heavily from under deep, black, bushy eyebrows.

"Ninety-five for any part of ten thousand!" he cried again, and the buzz of comment grew louder.

There were no sellers. Some of the members round him grinned, and he studied them with something akin to disgust, until a little man with a black, straggling beard squeezed his way into their midst and piped in a squeaky voice:

"Par for ten thousand!"

He did not get up on the seat, and he was almost too small to be seen among the crowd that was quickly converging toward post No. 3. The big man looked down upon him and, amid an excited hum, could be heard to say quite plainly:

"I'd like to call your bluff, Seckendorf; but what's the use? One hundred and five for any part of ten thousand!"

The bid came from him with the sharpness of a challenge, and I knew the game had begun.

Turning and elbowing his way out of the crowd, the little man scurried away. His challenger laughed, said something I did not catch, and, after a few minutes' wait, bid 110 for five thousand.

Still no sellers.

Considering the jumps the stock was taking, a strange lack of excitement marked the attitude of the majority of the members on the floor. Most of them looked sullen; some stood aloof and watched; the others crowded about the big man, with an eye upon the telephone signal-boards, rushing off when their numbers appeared and rushing

back again to find Rand Island a point or two higher than when they left post No. 3.

The big man, I presumed, was Rollins's friend. Rollins did not appear.

Some one sold a thousand shares at 120, and a moment later a quiet-voiced, white-haired gentleman made himself suddenly prominent by bidding 130 for any part of twenty thousand. The big man snorted, glared at the newcomer, and carried the "fight" ten points higher.

Perhaps a number were fooled into believing that it was a real fight. I knew better, and gave the big man credit for being an actor of no mean ability.

His expression of surprise when competed with was splendid. One would almost believe he was surprised; quite as if his competitors were not acting under orders from Rollins, who, I presumed, was pulling the wires upon the outside.

There wasn't, apparently, a share of the stock in sight; at least, there was none for sale at 150. I began to count my winnings at that figure when it altered to 160 with the assistance of a squat, square-jawed man, who did not leave until he had forced the big man to bid 175 for any part of twenty-five thousand.

In spite of the ninety-point rise, it was as if the fun were only beginning. There was plenty of noise, of course; men screeching at the pitch of their voices, rushing across the floor toward the telephones and back again, and out into the street; some of them white and frantic-eyed, most of them making great use of their arms, with the big man's staccato voice sounding above it all.

But there did not seem to be the fuss that adequately represented the eighty-eight thousand my partner and I had made within half an hour.

I had expected a sort of riot, but there was nothing like that; far from it, and I wondered what sort of a rise would be necessary to create one.

I did not get in the least excited. The stock was sure to go up to 200; and so long as the big man was confident I had nothing to worry about. He could, as he had said, carry it to 500 if he liked.

There wasn't a sign of weakness, and I stood fascinated, watching it climb, ten points each jump, till it reached 225.

The very little man with the straggling black beard came back and squeaked it up to that figure. His shrill, piping voice made me nervous, and there were many members on the floor who felt just as I did; wanted to yell but couldn't.

One or two became rather hysterical in their manner; most of them talked very fast and seemed to run around in circles, as if they did not know what to do with themselves.

Riot had almost come.

One cannot describe that noise. Some of it came from the street. It isn't a bit like the roar of a baseball crowd, because that is a volume of sound in which thirty to forty thousand throats create in unison.

The other business was a yell and a groan and a whisper and a low, reverberant murmuring and the scuffle of many feet, all jumbled up together in one horrible, inharmonious whole that began and ended nowhere.

I decided I would sell at 250, feeling that I would probably lose the benefit of a further fifty-point rise by doing so; and I had barely made the decision when the big man's staccato voice drowned the little man's squeak and his bid:

"Two hundred and thirty-five for any part of twenty thousand!"

Something like a groan went up. I edged toward the gallery exit, still leaning over the rail, almost hypnotized by the seething confusion of sound and action below.

"Two hundred and forty for twenty-five thousand!" some one called quietly, and I stopped to see who it was.

The white-haired gentleman looked

up at Rollins's friend, who jerked his head round and seemed to hesitate. Then he grinned—his lips curling back from his teeth.

"Two hundred and fifty for fifty thousand!" he bellowed, and there followed a moment's awful hush.

"Sold the lot!"

The answer came from underneath the gallery—a thunderbolt that wiped the smile from the big man's lips in a twinkling.

Every eye turned toward a tall, dark member of the exchange who emerged from obscurity and approached Rollins's friend with a terrible calm.

The latter went white—then gray. Leaning far over the rail, gaping at him foolishly, I saw his lips twitch and his glance go fearfully about him.

Fifty thousand sold at 250!

And there were not five thousand shares of Rand Island out of Rollins's hands within five hundred miles of New York at that moment!

I couldn't move. My knees felt wabbly, and my mind struggled vainly through a fog. Dark shapes of men raced about below, screeching at one another—pandemonium.

What happened in the succeeding few minutes was simply a jumble of incoherent things I did not understand; but I waited to see what the result would be.

I could see Rollins's friend looking about him dazedly, as if the shock had numbed his faculties quite as much as mine; and then out of the flurry and above the tumult a clarion voice asked:

"Want twenty-five thousand more at the price, Bailey?"

Rollins's friend threw his head back as if avoiding a blow and swung upon his tormentor like a wildcat.

"You heard me buy fifty thousand," he snarled.

I was far, far at sea. Something was all wrong somewhere. The "corner" was a fizzle, and my head felt rather light as I groped my way toward the exit, praying that I might reach a telephone before the crash came.

Even the door was too far.

"All right," the twenty-five thousand man shouted amicably before I had gone three steps; "here goes. Ten thousand at 240!"

It was like a straight right between the eyes. An uppercut, delivered by a "little" fellow anxious to unload, followed it a second later.

"Five hundred at 225!"

Just a moment's pause—then:

"A thousand at 200!"

I reached the door and took one look backward. Rollins's friend was tottering across the floor toward the telephones.

Riot had come.

"Ten thousand at 175!"

"Fifteen hundred at 160!"

"A thousand at 150!"

"Twenty-five thousand at par!"

My throat clogged up and there was a sort of mist before my eyes.

I don't know what the doorkeeper thought of me, but I staggered toward the elevator like a drunken man, feeling that I had been betrayed.

CHAPTER XIX.

JUST AN ACCIDENT.

WHEN I reached the street I did not stop to study the crowd or the seething torment of the curb-market half a square further down, but raced madly to Smith & Nelson's office.

There was a mob of fanatics there, too, crowding about the ticker, while some one in a deadly monotone read off the returns, and another worn-out-looking chap chalked them on a blackboard for all the world to see.

I had just buttonholed some one whom I thought I recognized as an employee, and was gulping out an order to sell when that lifeless voice chanted:

"Rand Island—80—77—75—"

It went lower than that — twenty-five points lower—almost quicker than the chap at the blackboard could write it down.

My hand fell away from the lapel of the other man's coat, and I stared stupidly into his face for a moment or two.

"Sorry, old chap; can't cover. I'm wiped out."

Whether he heard me or not amid that babel of tongues I do not know. He didn't say anything; just nodded and turned away.

I found the street again.

Everything was blurred, and I felt a little sick—light-headed, you know? Faces swept past me in an incessant stream; some white and drawn and fearful; some cadaverous and sneaking; others merely curious, and some that laughed!

Jostled upon right and left, deafened by the roar of the curb-market, I wanted to get away from it—as far away as possible.

Somehow or other I came to Battery Park.

A vacant seat beckoned me, and I watched in a dull sort of way the people go in and out of the aquarium; followed the movements of the tugs and lighters and ferries on the river, and saw a Liverpool boat sweep out past Governor's Island, leaving a trail of black smoke behind her.

I didn't care a rap about my forty-five hundred. My responsibility for Margaret's share dwarfed that.

If I had only sold at two hundred!

Ahead was the blank wall of failure; a pitilessly thick and high arrangement of facts that did not even take the trouble to explain themselves; and behind that wall—in an apartment up-town—a girl was waiting for release from a lie and to hear that I had won.

Something stuck in my throat, and the things round about me became uncertain. Margaret seemed to go a long way off, step by step toward the marriage that was so hateful to her—looking back in pitiful appeal.

A strange heaviness descended upon me. I felt as if I had intruded a few yards into a sort of paradise and been suddenly and rudely chucked out into the gutter of the world.

I was sorry there would be no elopement with a Christmassy effect—and I wanted to tell her so; was even selfish enough to want to tell her that if the lack of money made no difference to her it made none to me. I could work and earn—

There I stopped with a jerk, and came to my senses as if a pail of cold water had been thrown over me.

I'd have to work, of course, but it would be bad enough for one to live on what I could earn; two would probably starve.

Fortunately, I told myself in a feeble effort to find one little ray of sunshine, Campbell's Harlem Loan Company had the bulk of the jewelry; and when I thought of that I wondered if he had been caught in the avalanche. Whether he had or not I felt I could prevail upon him to give Margaret back her toys, and allow me to owe him four thousand, even though I hadn't the faintest idea when I would be able to discount the debt.

Unquestionably, the responsibility was mine. I had been too confident and too greedy; had placed too much reliance upon Rollins and his friend. That they had blundered with me was the only bit of satisfaction I had. Between them, however, they divided it; that purchase of "fifty thousand at two hundred and fifty" meant a loss of ten million!

I thought I would like to see how Rollins took a smash like that, and glancing at my watch, saw that it was quarter of one.

But I was denied the privilege just then. A messenger accosted me when I arrived at the exchange entrance and delivered a note from Rollins saying that he "regretted very much that the urgent nature of his business, *et cetera,*" but he hoped to meet me at dinner that evening as arranged.

The financial district was in the hands of the police, who were trying to regulate a noonday crowd, swelled

to most unusual proportions by rumors of a panic. As a matter of fact, Rand Island stock was not important enough to effect the general market, and only in that wild hour of its rise and fall did it excite the exchange to a frenzy that had almost died away in my short absence from the "Street."

Growing tired of watching the futile mob, and finding no relief in the antics of the curb-brokers, I sought a restaurant and lunched alone.

Groups of men, brokers all, seated about the round tables, talked in whispers, as if they were afraid that the other groups would hear what they said. The atmosphere of the place was mysterious and volcanic. It got on my nerves, and I couldn't eat.

I think I forgot to tip the waiter. I know I did forget to drop my ticket in the chopper of the subway, and the colored gentleman on guard called me back loudly and insinuatingly.

A local train carried me to Fifty-Ninth Street, and I wandered aimlessly up Central Park West, wondering how on earth I could communicate with Margaret at once.

An irresistible desire to see her and explain had led me up-town, and I thought that if she could send messages to me when Rollins was out there could be no danger if I were to send one to her.

First, however, I thought I'd try the telephone. It would be perfectly proper to inquire if Miss Rollins were improving. Doubtless I could learn from the reply how the land lay.

Finding a private booth and learning Rollins's telephone number from the telephone-book, I secured the connection and was answered by a rather pleasant-voiced female, who, the moment I said "Hello!" asked hurriedly —even roughly:

"This is Mr. Van Huysen, isn't it?"

For one second I hesitated—and I did not wish to give my own name.

"Yes." I tried to imitate Ralph's somewhat high-pitched tones. "Who is speaking, please?"

A low laugh came along the wire quite clearly.

"Is my voice so very different on the telephone? I'd recognize yours ten thousand miles away."

I was glad of that, but I did not say so. The voice at the other end of the wire was not Margaret's.

"How is Miss Rollins? Much better, I hope?"

"Oh, much!" came the answer, with a hint of ridicule in it. "She's convalescing in the park somewhere with your sister, so you needn't be afraid to talk to me. I am at the library phone with the door closed, and I've been praying all day that you'd call when she was out."

I almost dropped the receiver.

"Where's everybody?" I asked carefully.

"The Jap's flirting with Gretchen and the cook's gone out for a dill pickle or something. There's nobody bothering about me or what I'm doing. Is it all right for to-morrow night?"

Without realizing it, I was startled out of my "part."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"What's the matter?" came the query sharply, and the tone became harsh. "Ain't you feeling good?"

"Not very — and the phone, you know—rather dangerous—what?"

"Say! Who's that talking now? You ain't — that ain't Ralph's voice! Who are you? Who—my Gawd!"

It was only a whisper that trailed away into a horrified silence.

I hung up the receiver and went to look for Margaret in the park.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BENCHES IN THE PARK.

HAD I met Ralph Van Huysen then I would possibly have been foolish enough to discuss the matter with him in terms more forcible than polite.

Though it was really no business of mine, I was very much annoyed about it; in fact, went so far as to vow that,

whether I could afford it or not, Ralph should not marry his cousin.

I suppose that was rather puerile; but as I stationed myself at the park entrance nearest to the Rollins apartment, feeling sure that Alice and Margaret would come out that way, I did not become any the less decided about the affair.

After half an hour or so, watching the leaves fall, studying the afternoon loiterers and scanning the sparsely populated walks, became very monotonous, and in desperation I decided to penetrate further.

Scarcely a hundred yards round a curve was enough, and when I caught sight of them the cousins were rising from a seat to walk off the other way.

When I came up with them I was a little out of breath.

"Good afternoon."

They halted abruptly and reviewed me in blank amazement. I was glad the path was a quiet one.

The blood raced into Margaret's cheeks and forehead and throat, and then retreated instantly, leaving her deathly pale. For a fleeting second her eyes met mine. And my knees shook.

I stood within the gates once more, struggling to be calm, gazing at the slim figure of a girl in a little gray hat and a gray dress, and trembled because she was so near.

In a moment the heaviness descended again. The truth stalked up to me and pitched me out; I knew it was going to be very hard to speak through the bars to her and tell her why.

Alice, whose clothes harmonized so perfectly, in a quiet, unobtrusive way that one never noticed particularly what she wore, found her tongue first; and her control over her emotions has many times since then been a source of wonder to me.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Mason," she greeted me, with just the faintest hint of hostility in her tone. "We were just speculating upon whether you would come out of Wall Street a lion or a lamb."

"Then—you haven't heard—"

"Nothing," she interrupted lazily.

Some of the color had come back into Margaret's cheeks, though she continued to find it difficult to take her attention away from the little gold mesh-bag chain which she was winding around her fingers.

"Let's walk," I suggested, and determined to be as indifferent as possible under the keen surveillance of Alice's eyes. "Some one in the Rollins establishment informed me you were in the park. I telephoned."

A little hand on my right clutched my sleeve nervously.

"You telephoned!"

Fear reigned in tone and look, but the moment I turned my head and glanced downward Margaret became busy with the mesh-bag again. In the taxicab, without Alice to play censor, I suppose it had been different; but I hardly think, in any case, that she was as much afraid of me in the park as I was of her.

"I didn't give my name," I assured her. "Miss Van Huysen evidently knows of our partnership."

Margaret did not answer. I think she tried to, but couldn't find her tongue.

"I think so," Alice replied for her. "And, judging by your expression, what I predicted has happened."

"You predicted?"

"It hasn't!"

The interruption, filled with defiance, was Margaret's, and she looked suddenly up to me for support. I quailed before that appeal, and my tongue became very thick and unwieldly, seeming to clog my throat.

"I'm sorry—but I'm afraid—that is—we're—wiped out!"

"Wiped—out!"

I hardly think Alice heard it, but she turned her head away. It was just a breath, and the bright red of Margaret's lips faded to an anemic pink as she caught my arm again—not in disappointment, but in fear.

For a while no one said anything.

I felt like a brute—and then I wanted to tell her not to bother about it—that it was all right—I'd look after her. But I could not fool myself that way.

So I thought of the Harlem Loan Company again.

"You are sure?" Margaret whispered at last, just as I was going to say that I'd get the things back for her. "I—thought papa had everything—"

"Yes—I thought so, too, until some one unearthed fifty thousand shares from somewhere and sold them to your father at two hundred and fifty. But I should have sold at two hundred. I was greedy and waited, thinking we were quite safe—and the bottom dropped out of things in five minutes. You mustn't worry about it, though. I am sure I can get those things you sent me—"

"You won't! It is I who should give you—"

"You mustn't say that. It was my fault entirely. I was just aching to plunge and—"

"But you wouldn't have plunged if I hadn't told you of Rand Island. And you've lost everything!"

"Don't quarrel, children," Alice interrupted smoothly, in a superior motherly tone, and laughed in a manner I thought rather heartless. "You haven't time, and, besides, this is Central Park. I thought boys on roller-skates were not allowed in here."

A little chap, seated on his skates, whizzed past us down the quiet path.

"You said that some one sold Uncle Theodore fifty thousand at two hundred and fifty?" Alice queried somewhat absently.

"Exactly," I answered, trying to understand her attitude.

"Um! That's about five times what the stock is worth, isn't it? I should imagine Uncle Theodore won't feel a bit happy about that. When he learns, as he is sure to do, that his daughter has lost every piece of jewelry she owned in a fiasco, he will be positively unfit to live with."

"Alice!" The protest was Margaret's.

"Well"—airily—"what's the use of smothering the truth? It is mighty and will insist upon prevailing, so you might as well turn your innocent little face toward it and see what it looks like."

I tried to smile and to say something, but managed neither. Margaret seemed equally at a loss for a moment or two. Then she said very quietly:

"I'm not afraid."

"That is foolish," I declared. "I'll have those things back to you—"

"Who is going to lend you five to six thousand dollars without collateral, Mr. Mason?" Alice broke in, most irritatingly calm. "And even if you should find some one, don't you think that that's rather a cheap and easy way out?"

No mercy in that girl whatsoever.

"But—great Hea—guns! Miss Van Huysen, we can't—"

"Can't you? Then it is just as well you did not win. If you had you would both have made the mistake of your lives and been wretched forever and ever. So let's say 'Amen' to that."

"We won't!" Margaret objected strenuously, and I felt as if I would like to applaud. "I wouldn't take the old things back if he brought them to me. I'll draw every penny I've got, and—and—"

"How much is that?" Alice asked.

"Almost nine hundred dollars. Papa doesn't let me have more than a thousand at a time."

"Nine hundred," Alice repeated. "Would I be very rude if I inquired whether Mr. Mason could made it—a thousand?"

"I think I could do that."

Alice smiled.

"Well, you can't do anything today since the banks are closed. But lots of people have run away on much less than a thousand dollars.

"I read of the case of a man who tried it with seventy-five cents. To-

day, I believe, he is a prosperous cigar manufacturer, with a son at Yale, and the rest of the family preparing for Bryn Mawr. I don't suppose you could make cigars, Mr. Mason?"

"I never tried to. Let—let's find a seat and talk this over."

Alice glanced quickly up at me and away again. Margaret's fingers gripped my arm tighter and tighter. Perhaps it was Alice's taunts, or Margaret's courage in her helplessness, or the vow I had vowed, or a combination of all three that made me feel so very determined and serious; much more serious than I allowed them to believe I was. In any case, when we found a vacant seat I was in no mood for quibbling.

"Now, let's see," I began the moment we were seated; "us and company have just lost ten thousand dollars. Since it's no use crying over spilled milk we might as well face the music and decide here and now whether us and company shall be dissolved or not.

"I have saved about five hundred from the wreck, and my partner is rich to the tune of nine hundred. Total assets in hard cash, about fourteen hundred. Now, I think I can drive and take care of a car well enough to earn— What do they pay chauffeurs over here?"

Margaret's fingers slipped down to my hand and held on like grim death. They trusted me. I could feel that.

Alice laughed softly and looked away for a moment.

"Twenty-five dollars, I think, is a fair average," she said at last in a low tone, and her clear gray eyes came round again quite steadily. "But, of course, you're joking?"

I accepted the information and ignored the question.

"Do you mean twenty-five per week or month?"

"Week, of course."

"Not so bad, is it?" I looked to Margaret for a comment of some sort, and found her regarding me in mute astonishment. "Could we live on twenty-five per week?"

"Oh, please — please don't make fun!"

"Fun! I never was more serious. You are my responsibility now, and I'm not a bit afraid to undertake it. Do you think you could marry me— to-morrow?"

"Good Heavens!" Alice whispered involuntarily, and Margaret's eyes widened and widened till I thought they would never stop.

"Of course I know this isn't a bit orthodox. You're not getting half the fun out of it you ought to get. But it's original. Probably we'll make as good a shape at matrimony as lots of people I know who tackled it with all the usual frills.

"In the presence of a witness I haven't the least hesitancy in saying that I like you very much, and that though a week ago I hadn't any intention of marrying any one, you have removed my prejudices entirely. And you know you said a few minutes ago that you were not afraid."

"I'm not!"

"Then perhaps Miss Van Huysen will inform me where we could secure a license and that sort of thing."

Alice drew a sharp breath and blinked as I turned my head. All the starch seemed to have been taken out of her; but in a minute she was smiling and looking almost happy.

"Hoboken seems to be the logical aid to madness of this sort," she said calmly. "The city hall isn't more than a few steps from the ferry, and I believe the way is lined with justices of the peace."

"A sort of Gretna Green? That should do very well. Would you care to come along and witness the execution?"

"No, thanks." Very firmly.

Margaret moved uneasily, but said nothing.

"Really? You won't come?" I asked again.

"No. But, if you are really in

earnest about this I'll accompany Margaret to the ferry—the New York side—and meet you there. After that I refuse to be responsible for anything."

"Thank you. That will do very nicely, provided, of course, that my partner is agreeable."

Blushing furiously, Margaret looked up for a second, and a wan little smile of acquiescence parted her lips. The fear had gone out of her eyes.

Yet Alice seemed to envy her. In the succeeding few minutes, while Margaret looked as if she would like to run off somewhere and cry or dance — I was not sure which — Alice became quieter and quieter, trifling absently with a locket, and once or twice I thought her lip quivered.

When I left them, telling Alice that I should expect her to recommend me to any one who needed a chauffeur, she smiled and said:

"What's the use? You wouldn't stay a week."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE START.

THE evening papers, telling me again of our losses, failed to hurt as they might have done had that meeting in the park not taken place.

Apparently the fifty thousand shares sold at two hundred and fifty were by no means mythical. They had arrived in New York about midnight on Tuesday by special train from San Francisco.

Of the twenty-five thousand that had smashed the price to smithereens, fifteen thousand had been acquired in Cleveland alone, while the balance had been collected from other Western points.

So far did the brokers who handled the stock go with their stories and no farther; but it was enough to let me guess that the large stockholder in San Francisco had learned of the proposed elevation of Rand Island and had deliberately set about to checkmate Rollins and his friend.

Rollins's name was not mentioned in any of the reports. Bailey, the big man with the staccato voice, and with, apparently, little or no reputation to lose, got all the publicity and all the blame, so I imagined that Rollins was bearing the brunt of the cash losses of the combination.

He certainly looked as if he were at dinner that evening. His cheeks were the color of parchment; his smile like that of a death's head, and his hand so shaky that he could scarcely carry the soup-spoon to his mouth without spilling some of the contents.

Occasionally I saw in his eyes the black shadow of his heart; and then he was grinning horribly and chattering on about something far removed from Wall Street.

He almost blubbered when he spoke, and most of what he said was an incoherent jumble that began in England and ended in Hell's Kitchen.

Of course I was blind to everything, and with the sweets I inquired dutifully about his daughter's health.

A spoonful of meringue, halted in mid air. He looked over it at me as if he were questioning whether he had heard aright.

"She is much better. Much better. She was out to-day in the park. Beautiful in the park now, you know."

There was a light in his eyes I did not understand; something akin to triumphant cruelty.

We took a taxi to Ninth Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street, Rollins informing me that it would be so much more interesting if we walked the remainder of the way.

In spite of our having dined at Rollins's club, we were not in evening clothes. Lounge suits, autumn overcoats, and soft hats did not make us in the least conspicuous, and we came to the car-barns at the corner of Fifty-Fourth Street and Tenth Avenue without incident.

Rollins tried to give me the impression that he was familiar with the place, and failed. He played his part wretchedly.

First, he hoped we were not too early; then he was afraid that perhaps Crabbe might be late; further, it was so long since he had been in that region he did not suppose any one would remember him.

Looking down Fifty-Fourth Street toward the river, he muttered nervously:

"Horribly dark, isn't it?"

"Rather forbidding. But if we stand here much longer, those loungers at the corner will begin to pitch things at us. Where is the saloon in which you used to study types?"

"One block farther west. That's it, I think—the light at the other end of the street."

"I see the light, but are you sure it's the one you are looking for?"

"Oh, yes—quite sure. I remember it quite well."

He was not looking toward the Clachan's lights, which I thought were unusually bright, but furtively about him; and as a tram-motorman crossed from out of the shadow of the car-barn wall and walked heavily past us down Fifty-Fourth Street, Rollins seemed to pluck up courage all at once and followed him.

The street was very quiet, but the motorman trudging on ahead gave me a feeling of security. Rollins became quieter and quieter every yard. He appeared to have forgotten me.

Some one clinging close to the factory wall skulked past us and a stout woman came after him. Then I heard the tinkle of a piano, and all at once many voices joined in the slaughter of a popular piece of rag-time.

At first I was doubtful about the source of the sound, and then I realized that it came from the Clachan!

And as we drew near enough I saw that it was gaily decorated with flags and bunting, though there wasn't a soul to be seen outside its doors.

The motorman led the way to the place, but did not go inside. He plodded on round the corner. Rollins gripped my arm as the swing doors closed behind us.

"We'll go into the back room," he whispered. "It's more interesting there."

There were only three customers at the bar—an Italian and two large, fair-haired men who looked like Swedes. They took no notice of us, and one would never have believed that Andy, the bartender, had tried to save me from Batch's razor.

But the back room was quite another matter.

The tables were arranged so as to leave a large space in the center of the floor. Every light in the place was lit and almost every table occupied. At each there were at least one or two young women!

My first impression was that a local glee club, or something of the sort, had hired Campbell's back room to celebrate an "occasion" of their own.

Every one was in gala attire. There was no sign of the element I had encountered upon my first visit. The men were clean-shaven and neatly dressed; the women were dressed in the latest imitation of Fifth Avenue.

In the top corner, quite near *my* exit, stood the piano, at which a girl was seated with her back to me. A young man was gallantly turning the music.

I had heard a Harlem policeman call him "Jimmy."

And the pianist was Della!

CHAPTER XXII.

WALTZING AROUND WITH ROSIE.

SHE did not turn her head, not even when, as we gingerly made our way through the tobacco-smoke to a vacant table not far from the piano, a woman's voice called shrilly above the ragtime chorus:

"Oh, you blondy!"

The chorus wavered and several

laughed. I admit that I am rather fair. Della glanced up at Jimmy, but played right on.

"A seltzer an' milk for theirs, *garsong!*" some one called to a waiter. "Lump o' sugar in it."

"Say, sweetie! Howza mama?"

"Lamp the little guy, will ye? Don't he hate hisself?"

"Aw—can the chatter!"

"G'wan! I jus' love a man what can raise a *mus*-tache like Blondy. Room at your table, honeybug?"

"Ain't he the baby-doll?"

Evidently in a laudable attempt to drown the hail of comment, for which, I regret to say, the ladies were almost entirely responsible, Della repeated the chorus of the thing she was playing, *fortissimo*, and the singing began again loosely.

Leaning idly against the piano, Jimmy smiled upon the scene, and, though our eyes met, he gave no sign of recognition.

Rollins, palpably nervous, sat with his back to the door, principally because I forced him to by getting to the other side of the table first. Sitting side-on, I could watch both the signal-lights Campbell had designated and the piano.

One would have thought there were pins in Rollins's chair. It was quite plain that he had never been in a place like that before. He even seemed afraid of the waiter when that individual approached and barked:

"What'll ye have?"

Rollins ordered brandy, and looked as if he needed it. I trusted to Campbell's proprietorship and took my "usual."

A generously built, straw-haired girl and a lithe young man swung out into the center of the floor as Della plunged the piano keys into the throes of the turkey trot. Whether she intended it or not, the dance took a great deal of attention from us, and the first couple to answer the call was joined quickly by as many more as the floor space could uncomfortably accommodate.

The straw-haired girl sneaked my hat as she pirouetted past our table and clumped it back on my head the next time she visited us, blowing a kiss to me as she slid away. Her partner did not mind.

"Ain't she fresh?" a dark little girl at the next table queried of her escort, a heavily built, beetle-browed individual who was laboriously consuming a large cigar to the detriment of the already stifling atmosphere. "She ain't got no call to hand out that rough stuff to strangers."

The man awoke from the state of indifference with which he had regarded his surroundings and growled:

"Aw—that's nothin'; an' I don' notice the stranger gettin' on his ear about it. What's eatin' you, anyway?"

"No lady would of done what she done—an' you know it, Bill Gregg!"

Gregg laughed in the depths of his great chest, demolished his beer at a gulp, and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, grinned across the table at his partner.

"Can the hot air, Tillie, an' come down to oith. You been grousin' about my frien's since I brung you in. Rosie Paler's one swell skoit. If there wussent so much o' her I'd hang up my cady—"

He didn't finish.

With surprising suddenness the dark little girl rose, gripped the glass of beer at her hand, and flung the contents, with all the force her fury gave, into Gregg's face.

"You would!" she screamed passionately, as if the flood-gates of her wrath had been opened as a result of considerable pressure. "You'd make a monkey outa me—you big stiff!"

Gregg spluttered and almost swallowed his cigar, which sizzled and went out.

The music and the dancing stopped. Tillie glared about her like a hunted thing as the dancers closed round her, and Gregg, blinded and infuriated by the beer that stung in his eyes, swore and lunged wildly across the table.

Some one screamed; a glass crashed to the floor, and Rollins, white with fear, sprang up, as Tillie, with a little, choked-off cry, lurched away from Gregg's blow, slipped and toppled backward—into my lap!

A burst of raucous laughter greeted the dénouement, and the matter ended there.

Ere Gregg could recover his balance, several men crowded about him and forced him back into his chair, while Tillie and I, contrary to the facetious advice of several kindly disposed persons, disentangled ourselves.

The girl, casting but a single look behind, burst through the circle that barred her way and fled.

Rollins sat down again very slowly, visibly shaking, and looking as if he feared another rumpus that would not terminate so swiftly.

I observed Della staring straight at me without a particle of life in her expression. Her Cathedral Parkway clothes had given way to a waist and skirt; but it was easy to see that that made no difference to Jimmy, though it was difficult to understand whether he was attentive to her because of her standing with the "chief"—or simply because he wanted to be on his own account.

Suddenly, in the midst of the general chatter and the work of pacifying the ponderous Gregg—who, you may remember, was put upon the trail of the negro, Batch—some one shouted:

"Shake her up, Della! Here's Crabbe and Paler!"

Della swung lazily toward the piano, as I turned my head toward the door. Rollins glanced swiftly at me; we both watched the advance of "sub-lieutenants" Crabbe and Paler, who came down the center of the floor in a direct line, swerving not an inch to avoid collision with any one, but making the others give them the right of way.

They were of equal height, walked arm-in-arm, and physically were perfect specimens—until they came a little nearer. Then I wanted to laugh.

Each had one eye!

And each had the one the other hadn't!

I could not, even now, tell you which had which.

Rollins was plainly in distress; suggesting that he had met Crabbe possibly but once, and, as any one would have been likely to do, trusted to recognizing him again, through the medium of the hollow eye-socket.

They marched up to Gregg's table, to the accompaniment of ragtime, and the little crowd that hung round Tillie's aggrieved victim faded away, led by the straw-haired girl, to resume dancing.

Gregg looked up at the odd pair sullenly.

"Aw—she was grousin' all the time," he whined, before the others had given any indication that they knew anything about it, and as if he expected some punishment or other. "What ye want to come layin' it on to me for?"

"Who's goin' to, you big rummy?" the fellow nearest me asked and grinned the width of his face. "Trouble with you, Gregg, you got a hunch that the whole woild quits woik jus' to give you hell. Tillie ain't said a woid for or again' you, so don' go pannin' her. Why don' you git up an' rag? You ain't worryin' 'bout the coon's healt', are you?"

"Quit your kiddin', Paler," the big man advised and almost smiled. "If that nigger shakes the hosp'tal inside o' a mont'—I'll put him back to woik out his time." The smile became a laugh, callous and cruel, and Gregg raised his large bulk out of the chair slowly.

"Think Rosie'd slam me if I ast her to do a turn wit' me?"

"I ain't got Rosie's taste," Paler returned. "Mebbe she wouldn't. You got a tongue, ain't you?"

Gregg lumbered across the floor, dodging the dancers with surprising agility, and found a table, temporarily vacant, upon the other side of the

room. Paler took the seat he had vacated. Crabbe, who had not spoken so far, but whose one eye held enough shrewdness and evil to fill a dozen of the ordinary kind, seemed to notice Rollins all at once, and, on the point of sitting down, waved his hand to him.

"'Lo, old sport! How goes it? Have another on me."

Rollins's face twitched peculiarly and his lips appeared to get in the way of the things he wanted to say.

"I will—but later. I'd like to speak to you later—er—outside. I have something—"

"Aw—gwan, Bill Gregg! What ya take me for? A truck-horse? I got 'nough tuh do haulin' myself roun', let alone you. Me for Blondy!"

Miss Paler's strident voice drowned everything else, and ere I quite knew what had happened, she was standing over me asking me if I could turkey-trot.

She was very large and rough—but there wasn't an ounce of evil in her eyes.

"I'm afraid not. Hadn't you better choose some one more accomplished than I?"

"Nothin' doin'," Miss Paler declared, and froze Rollins with a glance, because he dared to move his hand nervously toward his glass. "You gotta trot wit' me afore you leave the room.

"The minute I seen you I says: 'It's no use, Rosie, you can't play no games wit' the cards stacked again' you. This new guy is your finish!' See? So if you ain't goin' to hop, we'll sen' your frien' over to keep Bill Gregg comp'ny an'—"

"Cut that out, Rosie," her brother broke in quietly.

"Aw—leave her be," Crabbe contended, and swung round upon some of the others who were threatening to become inquisitive. "What ye rubberin' at? Ain't the pianner still goin'? You wanted to speak to me, sir?"

The final question was directed at Rollins, who, though he rose shakily, seemed glad to do it.

"Er—eh—yes. Pardon me just a moment, will you?"

"Certainly," I agreed. "I am sure the lady will entertain me while you are gone."

Rollins's lips were blue and his smile was ghastly. Appearing not to notice, I glanced up at Miss Paler.

"Won't you sit down?"

Rollins and Crabbe moved away. Probably the only eyes that did not follow them were Rosie's.

A low laugh, coming from behind me, made her raise her head sharply, and her glance went over my shoulder.

"I'll bust you, Ted Paler!" she threatened vehemently, and her cheeks became beet red.

But her brother only grinned and called the waiter, which reminded me of my duty.

"Can I offer you anything?"

Rosie glanced quickly about her, as if she were afraid that some one might be watching us; and a few were surreptitiously.

"You think I'm fresh, don't you?" she asked, just as Rollins and Crabbe disappeared.

"Not at all," I assured her, with one eye upon the signal-light at the door. "Do you indulge at all?"

She looked steadily at me for fully a minute before she answered, and I imagined she had got my pedigree by that time.

"You don't belong here, mister," she told me in a much quieter tone. "An' I guess you think we're a bunch o' roughnecks. Well, we are. If you was born the son o' a man what had—what had done time, where the hotel bill d'ye think you'd be to-day?"

I hated to think about it. Rosie's wisdom was not to be trifled with, and one found, after a few minutes, that her face had more kindness than roughness in it.

"I don't know," I replied. "I suppose the great majority do go down, don't they?"

"You betcha, an' the only difference 'tween your sort an' my sort is that we ain't got so far to drop. Naw"—referring to the waiter's appearance—"I ain't drinking nothin'. I been on the wagon since I quit the milk.

"Can't you trot none? I'm a regular feather-weight when I'm dancing, an' I won't put your shine on the blink. Say, Della, strike up—give us the 'Robert E. Lee,' will you?"

The music ceased instantly, amid a chorus of divided opinion. I did not turn my head, and kept my eyes fixed upon the door.

There was a great deal of chatter and chaff, of which Rosie bore the brunt, using her powers of repartee as an expert fencer wields his foil. Then a new ragtime piece set the "floor" in motion again.

Miss Paler looked toward me.

With a glance at the door and another at the already crowded floor space, I protested feebly.

"There isn't any room for us."

"There ain't—eh?"

Rosie rose, and her voice rose higher still.

"Beat it, the bunch of you. Me an' Blondy's goin' to show you how they trot in high societee."

It cleared the floor like magic. I looked about me in search of relief, but there was none. A storm of approval burst upon me from all sides. Della turned her head, stared blankly at me for a moment or two—and nodded.

No one else would have thought it was intended for me. Jimmy also smiled encouragement, and Paler, fixing his single eye upon me, said, with a grin:

"Be a sport. She don't weigh more'n a ton."

"I'll paste you!" Rosie declared wrathfully amid a roar of laughter.

"Never mind him," I said, and, rising, offered my arm. "May I have the pleasure of dancing this number with you?"

"You sure may."

She grabbed my arm as if she were afraid I might retract, and, to an accompaniment of cheers, catcalls, much stamping of feet, and the piano, I was dragged into the intricacies of the turkey-trot.

The floor was bad, but Miss Paler had not lied about her weight when dancing, and Della's time, when we caught it above the tumult, was perfect. We paid no attention to the remarks of the bystanders, witty and coarse, that came from all sides, Rosie's tongue seeming to have lost all desire for revenge, while her eyes became actually dreamy.

Mine sped to the door every time I faced it.

No one else looked that way. The attention of the entire company was fixed upon us.

"Gee! You're a swell dancer!" my partner murmured ecstatically after a while, and her fingers gripped my shoulder like a vise. "I ain't such a elephant, am I?"

"Of course not. You dance beautifully."

She smiled, and her eyes softened; but two red eyes, blinking in a little black box near the door, took my attention away from her and told me that my time had come.

We waltzed nearer and nearer to the piano and my exit, till we were within a few feet of it.

The signal-light winked again twice.

Jimmy's forefingers went into his mouth, and a shrill whistle was the result.

The lights went out.

Even the bar shared the eclipse.

Women screamed, glasses went crashing to the floor, and something like a stampede ensued. Rosie flung her arms about me.

But that was not an embrace of fear.

Just as a small hand came out of the murk, gripped my sleeve and tugged, Rosie, to my complete surprise, whispered softly:

"You're all right, Blondy. Beat it!"

And in the winking of an eye she had kissed me!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MOTORMAN.

THE small hand tugged again, and I did not have to be told that it was Della's, as I swung round in the direction in which I thought the door ought to be.

But I did not have to search for it or open it. A large hand gripped my arm, thrust me forward into a greater darkness, and in a second I heard the click of a key turning in a lock.

Then I knew that I was in the kitchen and alone.

I did not hesitate or halt to think of anything save that the door to the yard was "straight ahead," and in a few moments I had found it, pulled the knob to the right, and was out in the open air.

Whew! But that was good after the reeking weight of the atmosphere in the back room; and I stood for a few seconds breathing it deep down into my lungs.

Then I turned to my right.

"Two wire fences and a wooden one," I repeated to myself. "And Brannigan's back door."

How ridiculously simple it had been! And how perfectly Rollins had been fooled! I had been at sea most of the time myself. Everything had been so utterly unlike what I had anticipated.

As I crept under the first fence the commotion in the "Clachan" died away, so I presumed the lights had been turned on again, and peace restored.

I speculated upon what Rollins thought of it—if anything had happened to him in the dark; not that I cared particularly whether anything had or not, so long as the little beast wasn't killed. I hoped Campbell's arrangements had been content to stop at the fifty thousand dollars he had paid for the evening's amusement.

Crawling under the second fence, confident that no danger could lurk in the back yards of unoccupied shops, I straightened up and tiptoed toward the last hurdle that separated me from Brannigan's.

The fence was of boards, rickety in every sense of the word. I was half way over when I felt the tug of a nail that threatened to rip the pocket of my coat, and as I tried to free myself without damage, a hand came out of the darkness behind me and hauled me back to earth!

For a second or two I did not know what to think. I could only feel the pressure of very powerful fingers about my arm, and was conscious of a dark shadow that looked down at me and inquired very quietly:

"Where do you think you're going?"

I blinked up at the fellow, with my tongue glued to the roof of my mouth, and saw, after my eyes became clearer, that he was a tram-car motorman—the one who had preceded Rollins and myself down Fifty-Fourth Street.

"W—what are you doing here?" I managed to articulate. "What right have you to—"

"Now, sonny, I'll make it easy for you," he interrupted quietly. "Don't ask no questions. Any man hereabouts that takes to climbing back-yard fences this hour o' the night can't afford to be inquisitive about another fellow's game. You an' me are goin' to a nice quiet place to have a little talk."

"But, great guns, man, I—"

"That'll be about all. Keep it till it's needed."

I did not understand, and all the while he spoke he kept a firm grip upon my arm, but when he tried to pull me with him down the yard I objected forcibly and succeeded in wrenching myself free.

But it was only for a minute.

With an oath, which I flattened with my left against his teeth, he rushed upon me, and in trying to avoid him I tripped and fell backward.

Two seconds later there was a "bracelet" upon my right wrist, and my motorman, holding the other, ordered me to get up.

"You'll sweat for that one," he informed me viciously, feeling his mouth.

"And you will suffer for this outrage!" I returned, my temper rising.

"All right. Let it go at that. Come on."

There was nothing else for me to do. Dragging me after him through the murk to the rear door of the shop, we had passed inside, while I gaped and wondered where he had got the keys, since Campbell had told me that he paid "rent to himself" for both shops.

The place was quite empty, and my motorman seemed to know his way about, leading me to the front door without any hesitation whatever. It was closed, but unlocked.

He stood for a while before opening it, as if he were listening for some sound or other he expected to hear; then, very cautiously, his hand went out to the knob, as the rattle of an approaching wagon came to our ears.

In a moment we were outside, and the door, which was not flush with the front of the building, was locked.

A policeman in uniform, idly swinging his night-club, stood upon the sidewalk probably a foot from the doorway! He was a big policeman and his back was toward us.

"Anythin' doin', Rafferty?" the motorman asked, keeping in the shadows of the doorway and holding me there, too.

Rafferty did not turn his head.

"Loights wint out tin minits since, sorr. Didn' ye hear the wimin screamin'?"

The motorman coughed.

"Anybody leave?"

"Three men, sorr. Wan av thim was drunk."

"Carey go in to see what the hollerin' was about?"

"Yes, sorr. Barkeep said as there was somethin' the matter wid the switch."

"Huh!"

A pause. Rafferty continued to swing his night-stick and to face front. A passer-by glanced quickly up at him and passed on.

The motorman hesitated a moment or two, then removed the handcuff from my wrist.

"I'm bein' decent to you because I think you're only a boob that's got in wrong," he told me quietly. "Go round to the station-house with Rafferty there—an' don't try for to beat him up or he'll knock your block off. Rafferty!"

"Yes, sorr."

"Take this gentleman round to your station-house and let the reserve squad keep him company till I get there."

Rafferty turned his head, and, whether he had known of my existence before or not, he showed no surprise. I knew it was perfectly useless to object, and caution bade me hold my peace until such time as I could talk to advantage.

I fell in by Rafferty's side and walked with him quite respectably, leaving the motorman standing in the shop doorway.

The policeman did not speak, nor did I, all the way to the station. People looked at us, of course, and I felt uncommonly guilty of something or other, but I wasn't a bit afraid of the outcome—after I had thought a little.

The lieutenant on desk-duty at the station-house glanced up from an evening newspaper, and looked at me over his glasses as Rafferty piloted me in.

"Well?"

"Detective Parks said I wuz to hould him in the min's room, sorr."

"What for? Parks make any charge?"

"No, sorr."

"Oh, is that so? What does Parks think this station-house is? Ain't he got men enough of his own without yanking mine off their beats to pull his easy marks? Had Carey wastin' his time around that dump, too, I suppose?"

"Yes, sorr."

"And Malone?"

"No, sorr."

"Huh!"

Frowning, the lieutenant went back to his paper. Evidently he and Parks were not of the same mind regarding "that dump," and I remembered that Parks was the central office man who had tipped his hat so respectfully to Campbell in the City Hall.

"Leave him here and get back on your beat!"

"Yes, sorr."

Rafferty saluted and trudged out, leaving me suspended in mid air, as it were, before the desk.

The lieutenant's attention was divorced from his paper to me again by a slow uplifting of his head, and he had eyes that went through one like gimlets.

"Come over here!"

I went to the rail that surrounded him as with majesty, leaning upon it.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Nothing at present. If you know any one who needs a chauffeur, though, I'd be glad to—"

The clerk put his hand over his mouth and the lieutenant's paper went down upon his desk with a crackling bang.

"Are you trying to kid me?"

"Not at all. I am perfectly serious."

For almost a minute he simply sat looking at me, and out of the corner of my eye I saw, through the open door of an adjoining room, several of what I presumed was the "reserve squad" craning their necks to hear and see.

"What did Parks pull you for?"

"You mean the motorman?" I queried innocently.

"Huh! Motorman! That's 'nough! Anybody that Parks can fool with a get-up like that is a rube. But what did he pull you for?"

"Climbing fences. A friend of mine and I went down to a beastly place on the corner of some avenue or other—I'm an Englishman, you know—"

"Sure, I know."

"There was dancing and all that sort of thing. Then the lights went out. I didn't know what the dickens was up, but I was very near a door and I skipped through it, and found myself in a yard. I started to climb fences looking for a way out, and had got over two when that idiot—"

"Idiot!"

The lieutenant repeated the word with relish and grinned his approval.

"—collared me and had me carted up here."

The lieutenant looked at me quizzically.

"I bet Parks thought he'd grabbed a hot one!" he exclaimed, and filled the office with his laughter.

But a commotion behind me ended it very abruptly.

Swinging about, I saw a few inquisitive people upon the sidewalk just below the green lights of the station-house, and in another half-minute a policeman appeared handcuffed to a little woman, who stared stolidly at the ground.

I had seen the policeman a week before at the corner of Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street. His prisoner had been walking with me at the time.

She was Beans Borrowman's friend—Mrs. Varelli!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FINISH.

HER hair hung about her face in straggling disorder, reminding one of a Skye terrier. There was a spot of blood upon her cheek and red streaks on her hands; her torn clothing gave every indication of a struggle.

It did not take me more than a second to realize that it would never do for either she or the policeman to recognize me. The story I had told the lieutenant and the fact that I had walked abroad with the owner of the "Clachan" would not agree.

I tried to get out of their way by turning my back upon them, and edging slowly toward the reserves' room.

"Where are you going?" the lieutenant asked sharply, and I stopped at once, feeling sure that I had made myself still more conspicuous. "Stay right there till you're told to move. What you got, Malone?"

"A dago woman, sorr. She was thryin' for to make a corpse of that bad divil, Tony Varelli, whin I butted in. She's his woife, sorr."

"Huh! Do much damage to him?"

"Knoifed him twicet, sorr, in Gorgan's saloon. The ambilance tuk him away. I got the names av witnesses, sorr."

"All right. Let's get it entered and— What are ye starin' at, both of ye?"

I had impetuously turned my head upon hearing Malone's charge against the little Italian girl, and both were regarding me questioningly. Recognition came into the prisoner's wild eyes first, but it followed in the twinkling blue of the Irishman's very quickly after, though he seemed a bit undecided about his guess.

"Nothin', sorr," he answered hurriedly. "But I seen the gintleman thare somewheres afore, an' I was thryin' for to plaice him."

I hoped fervently that he never would. Mrs. Varelli was studying the floor again.

"Here you, Krause!" the lieutenant roared suddenly toward the reserves' room. "Clear that bunch of rubbernecks away from the door. You have seen this gentleman before, Malone?"

"Yes, sorr, somewheres."

"Huh! That's vague enough."

Malone reddened a trifle, and went with his prisoner before the blotter in which the charge against her, with all the necessary frills, was entered, while I stood waiting for orders.

A reporter came in, nodded to the "czar of the precinct," and hung about until the latest entry in the blotter was completed.

As Mrs. Varelli, a broken, half-savage atom of humanity, was being led away to temporary quarters, she looked quickly up at me, plainly wondering why I was there.

"Know the lady?"

The lieutenant's voice was so very quiet it startled me, and the reporter's attention came away from the blotter instantly.

"No."

"Seemed to know you."

"Really!"

I saw the reporter grin. The lieutenant's glance went over my shoulder.

"Here's Parks," he announced, as if it did not matter. "I guess he's stabbed blind, found something an' didn't know it. We'll go inside, if you don't mind. Frank!"

"Yessir," his assistant answered instantly.

"Tell Malone I want him to remember where he saw this gentleman, and to do it before he leaves the station-house."

"Yessir."

The reporter was all eyes. Parks came in quietly, without any fuss, and I was marched into a room, which I presumed was intended for such conferences as that which followed.

When the door was carefully closed and I had accepted the offer of a chair by a flat-top desk, Parks, with a glance at the lieutenant, who remained standing, began with:

"Let me tell you something. The truth won't do you any harm, but the other thing will only get you in bad. What were you doin' climbin' them fences?"

I told him my story.

"Sounds all right. Where'd your friend go?"

"He went into the bar a few minutes before the lights went out."

"What's his name?"

"Rollins," I answered unhesitatingly.

"Does he live in the city?"

"Central Park West."

"Um—swell. What took you to that hole?"

"Rollins has been showing me the city for the past week, and wanted to let me see the rough as well as the smooth."

Parks and the lieutenant exchanged glances.

"You're just over?" the former asked after a second or two.

"Yes—I came across on the Randania ten days ago."

"And what's your name and address?"

I gave him both, and he nodded recognition of the name of the hotel.

"Well, Mr. Mason, you look all right and you talk all right, but I'd like to know why your friend Rollins came to me and said that if I'd guarantee his safety in MacGregor's saloon to-night he'd put me wise to something good about that Rob Roy bunch I've been trying to hang something on for a year."

I don't know whether my face betrayed what I felt or not. Parks gave no sign of suspicion, and I dared not look up to see what the lieutenant thought.

"He tried to tell me that he thought the brains of that bunch was a Fifth Avenue millionaire! What d'you think of that, Peters?"

Lieutenant Peters laughed, and I joined him—Heaven knows how.

"That was the gag he gave me," Parks continued. "I thought he was loony, but as I had business down here to-night I thought I'd humor the poor little gink—and no offense to you, sir. Wonder where he skipped to?"

"I should like to know, too," I declared, more anxiously than my inquisitors realized.

"Leave me his address, will you?" Parks asked. "No, you needn't mind. I'll get it in the telephone-book and call him later, to see if he got home. I knew you were his friend the minute I grabbed you, but I wanted to be sure you knew nothin'—and I guess you don't. Hope there's no ill-feelin'?"

"I was a little hasty myself, if you will remember."

Parks smiled and rose, and I followed suit.

"Just a minute."

The lieutenant's quiet voice sat me back in my chair again. Parks looked up and the lieutenant asked:

"Are you all through?"

"Sure. He's dry."

"Well, if you don't think I'm butting in, I'd like to ask him a few."

Parks hesitated a moment, then sat down smiling.

Peters saw that smile. I knew it would not do me any good. His gimletlike eyes fastened themselves upon my face and did not leave it.

"What about that chauffeur story you told me, Mr. Mason?"

I laughed, and I meant it. Parks seemed at a loss.

"Lots of chaps who have no money know all sorts of well-to-do people. I am tired of having no money, and driving somebody's car is about the only thing I could tackle. I lost quite a little money in Wall Street to-day, so I've simply got to get something to do. I suppose you read of it—the Rand Island smash?"

Parks smiled, and his eyes held a hint of kindness mingled with triumph. The lieutenant looked puzzled.

"You can't feeze him," the detective declared, "because he's straight."

"All right. Ring that bell, will you?"

"What the—"

"That's 'nough. I am running this station-house right now. Ring the bell."

Parks, with a look of wonderment, pressed a button under the table; a policeman answered it.

"Malone gone?"

"No, sir."

"Send him in here with that Varelli woman."

"Yessir."

"What's the idea?" Parks questioned, and glanced from the lieutenant to me. "Do you know?"

I shook my head—and all over, too—and sat on pins and needles till Malone and his prisoner entered.

"Close the door! And come over here, both of you," the lieutenant ordered sharply. "Here, you"—to Mrs. Varelli—"keep your head up."

The little Italian woman was sullen. Her inky-black eyes gleamed dangerously. Malone, stolidly subservient, looked everywhere else but at his chief.

"This gentleman says he's only been over here ten days," the latter declared slowly. "Now, take a good look at him, and tell me how you both come to have seen him before. You understand me?"

The question was directed at Mrs. Varelli.

"No un'erstan'," she replied sulkily.

"You don't—eh?" The lieutenant took two steps toward her and she shrank from him, wriggling in the bewildered Malone's grasp.

"Don't be scared. I ain't going to do nothin' to you. Tell me—you've seen that man before?"

Mrs. Varelli's expression became even more dark. Her free hand went up and brushed her hair from her face, so that we all saw the savagery in it more clearly, and her glance, like a dagger-point, fell upon me.

I sat perfectly still, waiting and watching to see her lips move. We were all doing that—only I think I realized the hate in her eyes more keenly than the others.

"Sure I seen heem—heem an' da Gregarack!"

Her voice was hoarse, threatening to crack, and the stillness that followed it was painful. Parks looked round; the kindness and triumph had gone from his face.

"The Gregarach—eh?" The lieutenant grinned, as if it did not surprise him. "When and where was that?"

"A wake ago, sorr; I remimber now." Malone broke in suddenly. "Him and Mr. MacGregor an' this woman, sorr, came up Fifty-Fourth Street all together."

"Is that right, Mrs. Varelli? You saw this gentleman last week?"

The girl nodded viciously.

"Dey maka me go back to Tony, an' Tony heet me. 'Twen' dol' I save an' Tony steala ev'ry dol'—an' he heet me—dere!"

Throwing back her hair still further, she revealed a great blue-black lump that had bled a little.

"Eef da Gregerack no maka me go back to Tony, I—"

"All right—keep it for the district attorney. Take her away, Malone."

The Irishman removed his charge, and when the door closed I felt strangely alone.

Again the lieutenant grinned.

Parks's lips were drawn very tightly together and the steadiness of his gaze embarrassed me.

"So you'd kid me, eh?"

He rose from his chair slowly—a giant of a man—his cheeks white with anger and his eyes shining amid the pallor like little pieces of live coal.

I did not move. Something seemed to chain me to the chair, though my hands clenched and my sinews became painfully taut.

"Go easy, Parks," the lieutenant's voice cautioned. "You ain't got anythin' on him yet."

"Huh! I'd only let Rockefeller fool me once. Put your hands on that table!"

"But, I say—"

"Can that! Put your hands on that table!"

"What are you going to do?"

His right hand went behind him swiftly, and came forward again bearing a weapon.

"Parks!" the lieutenant warned again.

"It's all right. Put your hands on that table!"

I obeyed; not that I was afraid the beggar would shoot. I knew he wouldn't do that, but a revolver—well—did you ever look down the barrel of one in the hands of a chap who was very angry?

In less time than I take to write it, he had gone through my pockets, first slapping them in search of a weapon, and came upon my pocketbook, which he tossed over to the lieutenant.

"Look through that, Peters."

Peters, without any compunction, looked and found principally—two pawn-tickets!

"One pendant, a thousand, at Bergson's. Two rings, at seven hundred and fifty, at Nospim's," he read off quietly. "Hocked the same day. At Nospim's, too! Gee! You're a dandy!"

He regarded me in undisguised admiration.

Parks put up his revolver, took the tickets from the lieutenant, and looked them over.

Then he paid me the same compliment.

"You sure don't look it," he said at last slowly, and shook his head. "But I know you ain't in with that Rob Roy bunch—yet. They'd never leave themselves wide open like that. But I guess you'll sleep in the pen to-night, after all."

And I did.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE INTRUDER.

I WAS held as a "suspicious person," because I would not explain how I, a bachelor, living in a hotel and acquainted with the suspected MacGregor, had come by so feminine a piece of jewelry as a pendant.

Parks then took me back to the privacy of the room we had been in, and, after further cross-examination, his opinion of me developed so far as to rate me as a "classy hotel and steamship crook," and he tried to frighten me by guessing at the length of my Scotland Yard record.

He telephoned my hotel and apparently learned that no one had missed anything.

Then he rang up the Rollins apartment and learned that my "friend" had not yet arrived home. It did not seem to excite him a great deal. Hanging up the receiver he swung lazily upon me.

"Hope nothin's happened to your friend," he declared; "because if anything has, you're going to get in worse an' worse. How did you come to know this saloonkeeper they call the 'Gregarack'?"

"That is my affair."

"All right. I ain't in any hurry. I've been after him for a year, and I guess I can wait a week or so longer."

"You don't mean to say you're going to keep me in one of your cells for a week! You can't. You have no charge—nothing."

"No—but I will have when the guy that owns them sparks you soaked misses them. Don't tell me what I can or can't do."

"Hang it all—isn't there such a thing as *habeas corpus?*"

He leaned his elbow upon the flat-top of the desk and looked with penetrating steadiness up at me.

"Sleep on this, Mr. Slick. If I want to you can do a seven-year stretch—just as you stand without nothin' but them bits o' paper to say 'Here's how.' I say, if I want to.

"While you're tryin' to sleep, remember that we got the guinea woman, too, an' that she apparently doesn't love you nor Gregarack. She's likely to know a thing or two, and likely to holler.

"Your friend Rollins may be down to see me to-morrow, and he may not be such a fool as he looks. If you want to get the benefit of bein' under the wire before your competitors, don't be bashful. It's your only chance. I said you'd sweat for that one you handed me, and I ain't goin' back on my word."

I regarded him a moment or two, wondering if he really expected me to believe him.

"You seem to forget there's a British consul in this city."

"He don't cut any ice." His brows lowered and his hand went out to a push-button. "Think it over and let me know the result in the morning."

A white-haired chap in uniform came in and saluted.

"Take him away," Parks growled, and the turnkey took my arm and led me out.

I spent a very restless night in a dark, cubby hole of a place, wondering incessantly whether I would get out in time to meet Margaret at half past ten the following morning.

Parks's threats could not keep me awake. I laughed at them. But a vision of Margaret—a little pale, perhaps, but hopeful—looking about her vainly for the man who had promised and did not come, grew more painfully distinct every minute.

It did not soothe me a great deal to know that there was nothing criminal that could be proved against me.

Even though I should succeed in getting in touch with the British consul, and rousing him on my behalf, it was a thousand to one that the red-tape would not unwind quickly enough for my needs.

Applying to Campbell was too risky. Parks knew him, and doubtless he had studied the Gregarach, too. That I knew them "both" might set the detective's mind off upon a line of thought which Rollins's hint regarding the identity of the leader of the Rob Roy gang would serve to strengthen.

I did not care to think of Rollins's treachery. It led my mind into very unpleasant fields of thought.

Campbell's double-dealing seemed very near its end; and with that end must come chaos. The man responsible for it would not be likely to escape scatheless.

The night dragged on, sixty hours to the minute it seemed, and some one who brought his heels down upon the flags in the passage, with the snap of an exploding percussion-cap, paced to and fro most of the time, making sleep still more impossible.

Upon my right some poor frightened creature whined at intervals in an eery fashion, while the chap on my left snored frightfully, and once I heard the sound of a sob.

In the cell the air was heavy to the point of suffocation, and everything one touched was hard and unyielding—no sympathy about anything.

When the dawn came my mind had found no relief. Margaret's accusing eyes were everywhere. Even daylight did not dispel them; and, after that, with unreasonable speed flew on toward half past ten.

About eight o'clock a uniformed chap brought me wretched coffee and rolls, which I would not touch. Ten minutes later another fellow came in and told me I was "wanted." He led me into the same room as before.

Parks was there alone.

The detective seemed to have had as little sleep as I. He sat at the desk in a leaden sort of way, growled at the fellow who had brought me in, so that he saluted and departed; then the detective tapped the desk for a minute or two with a huge digit, while his gaze, heavy as his attitude, came round to me very slowly.

"Well?"

"I'd like to telephone the British consul as soon as his office opens," I declared as calmly as possible.

Parks ignored the remark completely.

"Have you thought it over?" he asked deliberately.

"There was nothing to think over."

"No? Your friend Rollins hasn't got home yet."

I stared at him, unable to utter a syllable, then:

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Yes—and I guess you are, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin' that you don't understand," he returned sharply. "Rollins was last seen with you. You went into that place together by the front door. The lights go out. I find you making your getaway over the back

fences. Rollins disappears. What's the answer?

"I'll tell you. That poor little gink was too wise an' you got on to him. You were great pals—you an' him—but he never doped it out that you were stringin' him, gettin' ready to do him up. You met Gregarack last week and fixed it for last night and agreed to lead Rollins down to his finish. I guess he had a hunch there was something liable to happen to him and he came to me for protection. Now, do you know where you stand?"

He leaned a little farther over, and his eyes did their best to frighten me.

"You mean that I am in danger of being hanged for murder?"

He sat back in his chair again and regarded me.

"Some nerve," he concluded finally, and added in an easy tone: "Gregarack should be here in an hour."

"You mean—"

I stopped and shut my teeth on the rest.

"Huh! That worries you."

I made no answer. Everything round about me was quiet as the grave, so much so that I had a suspicion that the room was sound-proof. Parks moved a little in his chair and drummed upon the desk again.

"Give yourself a chance," he advised suddenly in an almost friendly tone. "You won't stand any when the crash comes, if you don't get in ahead of the bunch. They'll be fallin' over themselves tryin' to get to the district attorney.

"This ain't London. A slick article like you can play merry-go-round wit' Scotland Yard, because they ain't got nothin' on you. They got to get evidence—loads of it—afore they can put you away.

"Here it's different. If we don't like a guy's looks—that's enough. If he makes a hit with us—that's enough, too, the other way. I'm givin' you a chance before the Gregarack comes. After that you're dished. How about it?"

I almost told him he was an ass, but checked the impulse in time, and, remembering that he was viewing me from the "hotel and steamship crook" angle, did not think his remarks so idiotic.

"Sorry, but I can't take advantage of your offer, because I have nothing to tell."

Parks's eyebrows fell with ominous suddenness. His face became black as thunder; for half a minute I was calculating which would be the better blow—an uppercut or a straight right.

I thought he was going to hurl himself at me in sheer bad temper.

But he didn't.

The door opened just then and—

"Oh — hello, Parks! On the job bright and early, eh? Here's a gentleman who wants to see you."

I turned my head and saw a man in the uniform of a police-captain, holding the door open for Campbell.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DENIAL.

He closed the door behind him and, for a moment or two, stood with his back to it—a modern Hercules, garbed as a gentleman, smiling contentedly upon our amazement.

Parks's lips worked convulsively, and I thought he was going to demand Campbell's expulsion; instead, he rose slowly, staring as one who sees a ghost!

I looked from one to the other in astonishment, wondering how on earth Campbell managed to keep his face straight.

The uniformed individual, whom I took to be the captain of the precinct, went to the chair Parks had occupied, and said, as he sat down:

"Mr. Campbell has an order from Judge Farquhar to parole his friend, Mr. Mason, in his custody. I guess that goes."

"This gentleman is Mr. Mason," Campbell declared, coming over to me,

his deep tones sounding like the low, reverberant roll of distant thunder. "I'm sure he does not look like a horrible example."

He gripped my hand in both of his.

"I'm sorry I could not get down sooner. I just got in from Chicago at one o'clock and found that fathead, Rollins, in my rooms, scared to death that the police were after him for getting horribly drunk last night and raising the dust generally. He only remembered that you had been with him after I asked him how you had been getting along."

He laughed, and I joined him in unqualified admiration.

The captain grinned, too, and glanced up at Parks, who stood apart, studying Campbell with an intentness that I thought dangerous.

"Then, of course," Campbell went on, "the search for you began. Rollins was sure you had been killed. The place you were at was just that sort, he said—where men kill men for a song and get drunk on the music!"

Again we laughed—all but Parks. Campbell turned to the detective.

"Where on earth did you find him? Why was he held here overnight?"

Parks licked his lips. He looked uncomfortable and did not seem very anxious to reply.

"What's the trouble, Parks?" the captain asked, scrutinizing the detective heavily. "Mr. Mason looks all right to me, and I guess if Mr. Campbell and Judge Farquhar say he's O. K., that about cinches it. You got him entered as suspicious. What was he doin'?"

"Climbin' back-yard fences," Parks returned sulkily, and went no farther.

"Back-yard fences!" Campbell exclaimed in horror. "For lands' sakes, Mason—where?"

"Somewhere on Eleventh Avenue, I think—a bit west of a place where they keep cars," I replied as innocently as I could, and explained why I had been climbing fences, just as I had explained it to Parks.

The captain's brows came together in a frown.

"That's MacGregor's saloon, isn't it?" he asked of Parks.

"Oh! That peculiar chap!" Campbell exclaimed. "I own most of that section, you know, and if my memory serves me right, MacGregor rents the two stores next to his place, because he wishes to make a dance-hall out of them. I am not particularly in favor of dance-halls—not his sort. Would you recommend me permitting it, captain?"

The captain eyed his interrogator for about half a minute. Parks was watching Campbell like a hawk, and both officials seemed to have the same thought.

"Have you ever seen MacGregor, Mr. Campbell?" the captain asked very quietly.

"Once, I think, in my agent's office. He was a hulking man, if I am not mistaken, and my firmest recollection of him is the waistcoat he wore. Does his place make as much noise as it did?"

Not the flicker of an eyelid was visible, and the smile, a little whimsical, was perfect.

The captain looked puzzled and laughed forcedly.

"It's the quietest saloon in my precinct. MacGregor runs it like a tea-room, though the worst crowd in Christendom collects there — every man of them's been behind the bars for everything—from petty larceny to murder. Two of the classiest safe-crackers in the business are among them—the funniest pair to look at you ever saw. Each has only one eye—but even with that landmark we can't get enough on them to put them where they belong. Did you read of that Yonkers job—where the burglars left their cards behind?"

"I believe I did," Campbell replied. I glanced toward my boots.

"Well—we know who did it. There's only one man in the business who would open a safe like that—but

we can't touch him. It isn't a bit o' use pulling him to have to let him go, because we can't collect enough evidence to hold him. And he's got money to burn in his defense. We'd have grabbed MacGregor long ago but for that."

Campbell nodded understandingly.

"Seems a pity that the law should be so arranged to make the presence or absence of funds an important factor. There's something rotten in that state of Denmark. Didn't you say, Mason, that you were arrested by the detective here after you'd got over the second fence?"

The sudden switching of the subject made Parks fidget. Apparently he did not care for the change.

"Yes, the second fence," I answered, with my attention fixed upon the detective. "And he hauled me through an empty store to the street."

That was rather brutal, I know, but it was what Campbell wanted.

He glanced quickly at the captain and back to Parks. Neither looked very happy.

"I suppose you got permission from MacGregor, Mr. Parks?" Campbell queried mildly. "Any particular trouble expected?"

"I guess I owe you an apology, Mr. Campbell," Parks began, as if deciding to put the best face he could upon the matter. "I didn't know I was pullin' a friend of yours—but a friend of MacGregor's."

That velvet-covered claw was almost clever. The captain turned his head, and we all, from knowledge or suspicion, studied Campbell's face.

He smiled a little satirically, and his eyes were peculiarly quiet.

"I haven't much respect for MacGregor if he gives the police permission to enter his back yards to arrest his friends. Aren't you just a trifle mixed, Mr. Parks?"

Parks looked it, but he growled defiantly.

"He knows MacGregor. He was seen—"

"Doubtless," Campbell interrupted quickly. "If he was at the chap's saloon he would be likely to meet and know him. I am very sorry Rollins took him down to that place, and when he gets back from Boston—"

"Boston?" Parks said it.

"Yes, when he left me he said he was going to run up to Boston till the thing blew over. He was awfully scared, and I imagine he thought he did something much more serious than putting out the lights just for the dubious pleasure of hearing a lot of women scream.

"After I had telephoned Mr. Mason's hotel, and learned that the police had been inquiring there about him, I rang up Rollins at his apartment, and they told me he hadn't put in an appearance, but had called up to say he would not be home, as he was going right out of town for a few days. But I don't believe the beggar went at all.

"Perhaps he thought better of it as he grew more sober, and"—nodding toward Parks—"I think it was your name he babbled in the early hours of the morning in connection with something or other he had to tell you. Ring him up again and see if he's actually gone."

It was superbly done, and there was more emphasis upon that "again" than I could understand. Where he had got all his information baffled me, and in those few minutes I stood mentally aghast, learning to appreciate why Campbell had kept out of jail so long.

Parks looked like a man who had been fooled and knows it. His lips tightened, and I saw him glance toward the telephone, then sharply into his tormentor's face.

"How do you know I called before?"

That flattened me. I shrank behind Campbell, mentally and physically.

Campbell brushed a speck from his coat-lapel and murmured to it as the rumble of wheels came to our ears.

"Some one in the Rollins establishment, who was very much annoyed, asked me when I rang up, 'Are you here again?' and then, of course, apologized, and told me that a man named Parks had rung up several times, and since Miss Rollins wasn't very well the repeated ringing of the telephone bell was annoying. Didn't she say, too, that Rollins had gone out of town?"

The affirmative answer to both questions was written in Parks's face; and I don't suppose it made him feel any better for me to know that he had lied to me. There was no hint of malice in Campbell's tones. He was laughing at Parks, and I think the detective knew it.

The captain rose abruptly and said, in a rather tired tone:

"Well, I guess the argument doesn't lead anywhere, Mr. Campbell. If you'll come out to the desk with me we'll get Mr. Mason's belongings. My advice to him is to keep away from joints like MacGregor's. He'll be less likely to get into trouble."

"My point exactly, captain," Campbell declared as he gripped my arm. "Only you mustn't blame Mr. Mason —he's only been here ten days."

Parks's right hand, resting upon the table, clenched slowly. He did not speak, but I could see that he was thinking very rapidly, and could feel his eyes digging into the middle of my back as Campbell and I followed the captain out of the room to the desk outside.

There was a black police-van at the door. Campbell's car was visible through the window. Several of the morbidly curious hung about the sidewalk.

And there was a young man talking — or rather, trying to talk — to the lieutenant at the desk.

Campbell saw him before I did, and with perfect ease took the captain aside, as if he had something very private to say to him, leaving me to attack the situation alone.

The young man was Beans Borrowman!

A chill struck my heart, and it sank with nauseating suddenness. My hand went out, fumbling for the rail about the desk, and, blindly finding it, my fingers held on like grim death. Otherwise I think I should have collapsed.

That stuffy cell yawned again, with Campbell and his lieutenant for neighbors.

Beans's glance came over the lieutenant's shoulder, and his eyes, for a second, perhaps, became like saucers— then they were mere slits.

Feeling the floor sliding away from under me, I heard the lieutenant at the desk say bruskly:

"You can't see her unless when she's on her way to the wagon. What'd you wanna see her for, anyway? You ain't a dago!"

Beans's dusty face grew black, and as I got a grip upon my legs and moved in a leaden sort of way to the desk he edged away from it and skulked, foot by foot, nearer to the outer door, his expression gradually becoming more doubtful as he studied Campbell's perfectly tailored back.

"You're goin' to shake us?"

The lieutenant's affable query startled me.

"Yes," I stammered, and fervently hoped he spoke the truth.

"Well, I guess you'll find everything there."

He handed me a package, which I accepted, not really caring whether everything was in it or not, and I stuffed my watch, card-case, and so forth, into my pockets as quickly as I could, with an anxious eye for the threatening situation round about me.

With his side toward the street and Beans, Campbell faced the door which led to the cells. His right hand, out of the captain's sight, rested on his hip.

Suddenly Parks appeared in the doorway, walking with lockstep precision before a prisoner apparently just brought from the "cooler."

It was Mrs. Varelli.

Still shuffling toward the door, regarding Campbell's attire, Beans's expression changed. Halting and hesitating a moment or two, his pallid lips parted in a grin that vanished even more quickly than it had come, and, turning, he slipped out and away like a shadow just as Parks, within a yard or two of Campbell and the captain, swerved to one side.

Mrs. Varelli, startled a little, looked up and stopped as she so suddenly caught sight of a man who looked like the Gregarach, yet was so different.

Campbell gave no sign that he knew she was there, even though the captain broke off in the middle of something he was saying to glance in her direction.

Disheveled and tattered, her cheeks streaked with tears, she hated all the world just then, but Parks, swinging about to watch, only saw her eyes brighten and the sullenness die out of her face.

She almost smiled.

"The lady seems to think she knows you, Mr. Campbell?" Parks suggested pleasantly, and the policeman, who apparently understood his part, did not move on.

"Er—what lady? Oh!"

Campbell appeared to notice Mrs. Varelli of a sudden.

"I'm afraid she has the advantage of me," he said smoothly, after a moment's study.

Mrs. Varelli shot a swift glance toward Parks, and her face became as expressionless as a blank wall.

"No understan'."

"You've seen him before?" Parks assisted, as if out of sheer kindness he was humoring the poor girl.

She looked at him, then at Campbell, then at the captain, and back to Parks again.

And shook her head.

"I know de cap'n w'en Tony steals da mon' las' year."

"Yes, yes—but the other gentleman?"

Mrs. Varelli looked straight up into Campbell's face and found him smiling.

"How I know bigga man lika dat? Me—I'm poora gal!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

BY THE WAY.

THE sigh of relief I drew was quite audible. I am sure the lieutenant heard it. But all he said was, "Sign this;" and, tingling from head to foot as a result of the reaction, I grabbed the pen he held out to me and shakily signed a paper of some sort that might have been my own death-warrant for all I knew.

"All ready, Mason?"

Campbell's deep-toned query helped to dispel the numbness that had taken possession of my mind and limbs, and, glancing upward, I saw him looking past the chagrined Parks, over Mrs. Varelli's head, with a suggestion that they both bored him a little.

Parks glanced toward the policeman in charge of the prisoner, whose eyes were studiously bent upon the floor, and they moved on toward the police-wagon.

Campbell shook hands with the captain, who nodded to me and passed into his office.

Then the Gregarach held out his hand to Parks.

The detective's cheeks grew scarlet, and his eyes looked everywhere in a second—at me—at the men hanging about the reserves' room—out toward the street, where a small crowd stared at the poor little Italian woman being driven—Heaven knows where!

"Good-by, Mr. Parks."

"Good day, sir."

There was all the difference in the world in a word. Parks meant *au revoir* as he accepted the hand of the man he had been "tryin' to get somethin' on for a year."

In half a minute more we were out in the street and into the waiting car.

Every throb of the machine spelled

freedom, and the smile came back into Margaret's eyes as I glanced at my watch and found I had an hour to spare.

At once the car swung out from the curb and away from the sordid atmosphere of criminality. Two squares later I protested hurriedly.

"I say, I can't go home with you. I have an important engage—"

"Not to-day, I'm afraid," Campbell interrupted, and the sparkle departed from his eyes. "Margaret will be unable to keep her appointment. She met with a slight accident last evening and—"

"What?"

"Rollins claims that she tripped over a rug in the library and struck her head against a sharp corner of the mantel. But the slight wound is at the back of the head, and there is a blue-black mark over the left temple, such as might have been made by the blow of a clenched fist."

I stared at him in horror.

"You—you don't mean to say he—"

"Exactly." His jaws snapped on the word like a trap, and for a moment I felt limp.

Then resentment, like a river in flood, swept over me. I saw red and Rollins's ashen face across the table in the club the previous evening. I understood, with a hideous desire to wipe out his leering smile, why he had been so extremely nervous when I mentioned Margaret's name.

"Don't look so murderous," Campbell said quietly, after a while. "One might believe the delay annoyed you?"

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Wheesht, man, it's all right. I'm glad it does. I found Margaret in my rooms this morning, and she told me all about it. She ran away and came to the only place she could trust. But I took her home again.

"She told me several complimentary things about you, and I'm beginning to think they weren't altogether too inflated, but I'm afraid you don't realize what matrimony on twenty-five-a-week means?"

Into Broadway we went, but the bustle of life there did not make me feel any more cheerful. We were going up-town when I thought we ought to be going down to the ferry.

"What the dickens have you got to do with it?" I asked after a minute or so, and have to confess that I was a little jealous of his air of authority over Margaret's actions. "I've played my part in your affairs, and I think you're going to have enough to do keeping out of jail without bothering about my matrimonial intentions."

He only grinned.

"Margaret wouldn't marry you if I said 'No.'"

"The deuce she wouldn't! You might as well say that she only agreed to do so simply because you put her up to it!"

"Pretty nearly that."

This put a clamp on my tongue and made me dull and heavy. Campbell looked up at a great electric sign and remarked with beastly irrevelance:

"Looks gaunt and ugly in the daylight, doesn't it?"

But I did not speak again until we had reached his rooms.

After I had washed and made a pretense of tackling breakfast—the while Campbell hung about the window quite a lot—I asked pointblank, with a mental vision of the blue-black mark on Margaret's forehead before me:

"Has Rollins really gone to Boston?"

Campbell turned his head.

"Not exactly. At present I believe he is recovering from the effects of a harmless but necessary drug in my ——th Street house."

"Good Lord!"

"Interesting, isn't it? But there is nothing to be alarmed about—yet. Let's go inside and smoke. I want to telephone several people."

I rose and followed him into an adjoining room, feeling my nether limbs a little uncertain.

"How the dickens did you get him there?" I asked, accepting one of his cigars.

"On his feet. Crabbe and Crowley assisted him."

"They were the three men—"

"I suppose so. They walked him out under the noses of Policemen Carey and Rafferty and brought him up to me. I didn't know that anything had happened to you until I called the night-clerk at your hotel to see if you had reached home all right. He told me that a Detective Parks had said he had you in custody and had been seeking information about you. Then, of course, I understood that the motorman had been playing escort to Rollins when he walked down Fifty-Fourth Street in front of you."

I sat down slowly.

"Where were you?"

"At home, but Crowley saw him, though he lost him afterward, and you found him in the last place in the world Crowley would have thought of looking for him. I knew then that to get you out of jail I'd either have to let Rollins go or arrange a lie to account for his disappearance. The lie was much easier."

The shadow of a smile came and went, and blowing a long stream of smoke toward the ceiling, he walked over to the window and looked down into the street, seeming to have forgotten that he wanted to telephone. I could not see how the lie had been at all easy. It seemed deuced risky to me.

"Do you know that Rollins went to Parks and told him that the leader of that choice company of yours was a Fifth Avenue millionaire?"

Campbell turned his head.

"How do you know that?"

"Parks made a confidant of me before he found the pawn-tickets."

"I see. I knew Rollins rang up 3100 Spring from his apartment about a week ago and met Parks at Columbus Circle, but, of course, I could not learn what was said."

I stared at him and laughed foolishly.

"How on earth—"

"It isn't difficult. People who live in apartment houses sign a slip for every call, and the number of the call is on the slip. Rollins hasn't the faintest idea that any one in his domestic employ knows what 3100 Spring means, any more than he realizes that practically every movement he has made since you landed here has been watched.

"That is why I went to the trouble of sending you over those fences. I suspected that Rollins would fetch an escort. It isn't every man who can purpose murder with the assistance of the police!"

The audacity of the thing made me gasp. Had I been assassinated Rollins would actually have had the favorable testimony of the police upon his side.

Campbell glanced out of the window again, and I took the opportunity to think a little in an effort to get things straight. When he faced about and began pacing the floor restlessly I watched him for a minute, then asked:

"You mean you have some one in Rollins's apartment—"

"Margaret's maid. I put her there some time ago with Margaret's innocent cooperation, and it was she who helped me with the lie. She used to be a dresser in the same company as the Gobbler's mother, and is the lady, if you will remember, who did not care so much for Smith's blood as she did for his money. So when I needed some one of the sort, her qualifications seemed to answer perfectly."

"Then she knows that Rollins is the Gobbler's father."

"Yes—and who I am, too. But there is no murder in her eye, and she is no friend of the police. She is making too much money very easily to wish to have the men who pay it—"

"Blackmail!"

"No—no, of course not. But if Rollins were dead, and I were in jail, her job, which is paying her two sal-

aries, would be gone. After I am through with him, she can blackmail him if she cares to. As for myself, she can't tell Parks any more than Rollins has done."

"But she might hit at Margaret."

"Not much fear of that, principally because when I'm through with Rollins, Margaret won't be there to be hit."

I colored slightly, and felt the steady gleam of his eyes uncomfortable.

"Don't mistake me, Didderington," he said in tones that went fathoms deep. "I have seen this coming since the day Rollins ran away to Europe and left Nessie Borrowman behind to eat her heart out and die. So long as that scum crawled the earth I knew that there was no safety for me or mine. But I made sure that if I fell, he would fall with me—and underneath!"

He went to the window again, and my eyes followed him dubiously, wondering what the end would be.

After a little while he backoned me, and I rose and joined him.

Through the curtains I saw a taxicab, a trolley, two women, a truck, a boy and a dog, a large touring-car, and several men.

"Well?" I asked wonderingly.

"See that hat and shoulders just down below?"

I craned my neck and saw.

"Yes. What about them?"

"I saw them in my mind's eye months ago, and they just arrived this minute. They belong to one of Parks's men. And there is probably another we don't see. There will be two more watching the ——th Street house, where Rollins is. If I am not mistaken, we are going to have an interesting evening."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BUSY WIRE.

"We!"

"Yes. We must have everything in order—parent's consent, and so on. It's all right. There's no danger. Those fellows down there are only anxious to know how I change my skin. Just a minute."

He picked up the receiver while I stood staring blankly, wondering if he wasn't quite mad.

Giving a Harlem number, he called presently:

"Hello! Jimmy? MacGregor. Yes. He's all right. Ship those things he left with you the other day up to Della's. Yes—to-day, and anything else you may have. Nothing else? Good.

"No—not yet. But there's a chance that some people may be up to look you over. All right. You know what to do. Yes. I'm out of town. Oh—three or four days. Good-by."

The receiver went up on the hook slowly.

"How do you run that place?" I asked, marveling at his indifference at the detective below.

He did not look at me as he answered absently:

"It's just a blind. We hold our collections there for a while, and then get rid of them. Try and amuse yourself for five minutes. I think there are some English weeklies on that table over there. Hello!"

This time it was Rollins's apartment.

Campbell did not ask for any one, and the English weeklies did not interest me nearly as much as the one-sided conversation that followed.

"Hello! Campbell. Yes. Any more calls? That's good. Yes. Miss Rollins feeling better? No. She mustn't do that. I'll call for her. I am afraid you'd better not. I may need you there. Make it some other night.

"Impossible, my dear girl. I am sure Miss Rollins needs you, and I do not think your sister is as important as your safety is to yourself. They must not have the faintest suspicion—What's that? Don't you think it's rather late in the day to say you don't

care? Better think it over. Quite impossible. Good-by."

The receiver went up impatiently and his brows came together.

"Is that girl pretty?" I asked.

"Yes—rather. Why?"

"And she wants to go out to-night?"

"To her sister's. How did you guess that?"

"Has she gone to her sister's often of late?"

"Quite a lot. Why the catechism?"

"Because I am afraid her sister is—Ralph Van Huysen."

I suppose I saw in his face what he had seen in mine many times—amazement of the blankest order. But there was something else: an intermingling of fear and anger—mostly the latter. His eyes became like steel, pitiless and hard.

"Say what ye mean, man!" He snapped it at me with a trace of Scotch and as if I were to blame for the whole thing.

And I told him of the occasion on which I had rung up the Rollins apartment.

It made him rise and take to pacing the floor with the impatience of a caged lion. Suddenly he swung upon me and exploded:

"There you have an example of the everlasting conceit of which we are all more or less guilty. This girl saw Nessie Borrowman throw her life away on a worthless cur, closed her eyes, and cursed her murderer at her bedside. Yet she let's herself be fooled in the same way by a whelp of the same breed."

I nodded.

"Seems like it, doesn't it?"

"And the worst of the business is that we cannot afford to interfere or antagonize her just at present."

Campbell rang for his man, who had the face of a Greek god and the accent of a cockney.

"Pack one of my suit-cases at once and go to the Grand Central Station, and take a ticket for anywhere except Boston. When you go out, carry the bag so that my initials will be plainly seen. Stay away three or four days. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," without emotion.

"When you get down-stairs you needn't hurry about it. A trolley will do."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Vail to get out the car and drive to the Van Huysens', and wait for me there. Let me know when you are ready to go."

"Yes, sir."

The valet departed, and I looked toward Campbell for an explanation.

"Just a minute," he said absently, and went to the telephone again and, getting the connection he wanted, called very quietly:

"Hello! Crowley? Yes. Is he still asleep? That doesn't matter. Let him whine. But if he makes too much noise gag him. Any one hanging about outside? Well, I fancy they are there, just the same. Good-by."

As he rose I was impelled to ask: "How the deuce do you keep command of these people?"

"Organization—good pay—safety—fear of what rebellion means—the power of money—and these."

He held out his great hands clenched, and there was no denying the brute influence of them.

"I never preach the twaddle of uplifting the masses," he continued. "Let Fifth Avenue and Berkeley Square stay where they are. They would be out of place in Hell's Kitchen or Whitechapel, and would, maybe, only make them worse than they are.

"It's only the unfortunates who cannot help themselves out of perpetual poverty and sickness and tears that I bother with. The others are living the lives the Lord gave them—and if they're no' very bonny, it canna' be laid to your door or mine.

"As for my crew, they know that I have money. They've seen its power and sheltered themselves behind its capabilities. The machinery of the law

can't be set in motion by the poor. It costs too much. The seedy plaintiff is sneered at the minute he appears. Justice, like any commodity, is bought and paid for.

"That Varelli woman had sense enough to remember that this morning. She did not recognize me simply because she forgot her hatred to remember that I am her only hope of defense. Her life hasn't held much for which to be thankful; and if that beast of a husband of hers dies, the least she can expect is a life sentence — if we don't buy some justice for her. I must run down and see my friend Seton Tait about it. He's rather clever in affairs of that sort."

He went to the window, and I followed him and saw Parks's man still in evidence.

"What's your idea in sending your man out of town?" I asked.

"Watch."

The valet came in, said he was ready, and was told to depart at once.

We stood at the window, studying the hat and shoulders, and presently saw the valet appear, carrying a suit-case with R. M. C. marked in white upon it.

The hat and shoulders became suddenly animated, and resolved themselves into a man of large proportions, who carefully followed the suit-case on board a trolley.

"That means there are two of them," Campbell declared. "And the other, if I had my car brought here, wouldn't bother hiring a taxi to follow me unless you were with me. Now, of course, he thinks we are going to separate and that I shall follow the suit-case. The man we don't see will follow you."

"Me?"

"You're a suspicious character. The police blotter says so, and Parks thinks you are much more so. But our friend down-stairs only thinks he will follow you. When I walk out of here and stroll across the park to the Van Huysens' he will know that I am not going to walk to anywhere that my valet needs a trolley-car to reach. He will flounder about for half a minute or so, wishing there were two of him, and then—he will follow me across the park to the Van Huysens'. Five minutes later you will leave here and go up to Della's. That is her address."

He scribbled the number upon a card and I took it blankly.

"And then what?"

"Stay there till nine-thirty this evening, then come down to ——th Street. Della will give you Margaret's jewelry, and you may bring it down with you. You can't very well go back to your hotel — at least, not comfortably. The management would probably tell you to pay your bill and get out. Don't forget. Five minutes after I leave, followed by his nibs down-stairs, you skip up-town. The trolley passing here will take you almost to the door."

I agreed blindly; because he held the key to my future and there was nothing else to do.

Standing by the window after he had left me, I saw him stride forth and walk directly across the street, to stroll leisurely toward the nearest park entrance.

A taxi crawled into view and after him.

Campbell turned into the park, and some one got out of the taxi and followed. It was all very obvious—when pointed out beforehand.

Then the telephone bell shrilled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

QUITE UNEXPECTED.

THE sound startled me, and for a minute I did not know whether to answer or not. While I was considering it rang again more insistently.

Proving how I felt toward it, I actually approached on tiptoe and, gingerly taking up the receiver, called quietly:

"Hello!"

"There's your party," a sharp, feminine voice answered, and a small, carefully modulated one asked instantly:

"Hello! Mr. Campbell's apartment?"

"Who is speaking, please?"

"Margaret. This is Mr. Mason, isn't it?"

"Good morning. How did you know I was here?"

"Saw you and Mr. Campbell go up. I'm only half a dozen doors away. I saw Mr. Campbell go out, so I thought perhaps you'd come up and let me apologize properly. There's nothing to be afraid of. Papa's gone out of town. You know the number?"

"Of course, but—"

"Then it shouldn't be very difficult. Good-by."

And she was gone, leaving me in a most unpleasant quandary.

If I did not accept her invitation she would very likely be displeased. If I did I should disobey Campbell's orders.

I think that settled it; that and a desire to be assured that she was not badly hurt. Her voice did not sound as if she had been, but the evidence wasn't altogether satisfactory, and Campbell's attitude of proprietorship over her rankled.

There was little or no hesitation after that.

When I got down into the street, had looked carefully around, and could find no trace of anything that looked like a detective, I could see no danger in delaying my trip up-town fifteen minutes or so.

There was a policeman at the corner, but he paid no attention to me as I passed, and I reached the Rollins apartment without any bother.

Of course, I was a little dubious about encountering Margaret's maid; but since she had never seen me, she was not likely to know that it had been I to whom she had spoken on the telephone.

A Jap butler took me for granted and showed me into the drawing-room. There was no one there and not another servant in sight, so I made myself comfortable in a very roomy chair which made me sit with my back to some hangings that blotted out another room.

Gluing my attention upon the door, I waited possibly half a minute, and then a soft hand from behind my chair went over my eyes and another over my mouth, choking off an exclamation of surprise.

"S-h!"

I felt a thrill go through me that raced down to my boots, and, reaching up, I caught both hands and pulled their owner into view.

She made me gasp.

Her cheeks were not even a little pale, and there wasn't the slightest evidence of a wound. Leaning away from me, crimson-cheeked and laughing, she looked stunning in the pinkish silk thing she wore, and there was something of the taxicab mood in her face; that attitude which declared she wasn't a bit afraid of me when she got me alone.

"I want to apologize for not keeping this morning's engagement," she said. "Mr. Campbell thought we'd better postpone it for a day or so."

"Oh! That was it? And you put me off simply to please Campbell?"

"I didn't!"

"Seems very much like it," I persisted deliberately, remembering with a twinge what Campbell had said.

She studied me queerly for a little while, as if she were trying to understand exactly what I meant.

"Does it matter?" she asked, and her eyes grew softer than I had ever seen them.

"Well, isn't it usual to consult the man you are going to marry first?"

"Yes — I suppose it is. But Mr. Campbell thought—"

I relinquished her hands and she stopped abruptly, looking very much surprised; but she did not move away, and I, scrutinizing the pattern of the carpet, said:

"And what Mr. Campbell thinks is more important than what I think. How did you know I should like to be put off? You're going to marry me, you know—not him."

Margaret's face was a study.

"You're angry?"

"Not a bit."

"You are."

"I simply want to be understood, that's all."

"But I don't understand. Yesterday you were so different. So splendid! And now you look as if you wanted to pick a quarrel."

"I simply object to having our arrangements interfered with by outsiders. No one else has a right to postpone—"

"You mean Mr. Campbell?"

"He or any one else. Just as I will be prepared to protect you from your father, I hope to be able to get married and live happily ever after without any outside assistance. Judging by this apparently unwarranted postponement, I may expect Campbell to hold the reins afterward, too. And, here and now, I may as well lodge an emphatic objection to that. Campbell is all very well in his way, but—"

"Don't you dare to say anything against Mr. Campbell!"

She went white in a second. Her eyes were burning, and her little hands so tightly clenched I could see the knuckles shining through.

I got to my feet before I knew it and faced her, wanting to kiss the hardness from her little mouth, yet tugged back by pride or jealousy or pique.

"Very well. We won't discuss the gentleman. But I think, before we proceed further in our intentions, that you had better be sure of whom you are marrying and why. I don't want to feel that you married me because Campbell said to."

The anger passed out of her eyes and her head dropped. She looked down at her hands and fumbled with a ring.

"If he told you not to you wouldn't, would you?"

No answer, and no movement save the twirling of the ring.

"He was the beginning and the end of this, wasn't he? You simply obeyed orders; thought it was rather romantic and an easy way out of something that would be just a little more hateful and that wouldn't let you defy your father. Wasn't that it?"

Still no answer.

"I don't think you quite realize what you were going to do, and I suppose I've been a bit of a fool, too, to think that it was possible upon so short notice. I think we gave that Bob Dolliver - Lady Alice precedent too much weight. She didn't run away because some one told her to. She did it because she loved the man, and if I didn't like you as much as I do I wouldn't—"

Her head came up slowly.

Good Heavens! What eyes!

They went through and through me—electrified me—made me tingle from head to foot.

"Do you think if—if I didn't—"

She stopped, and I thought she was going to fall. At any rate, I caught her as she lurched toward me; and held her, too.

A sob was smothered in the folds of my jacket, and I stood like a sheep, feeling like a brute, wondering if it would do any good if I kissed her.

I tilted her face up, and I wonder how many men have seen a woman look as she did then.

Try as I will, I can't explain it.

Only one woman ever seems like that to one man. The rest may imitate—but as Margaret's arms came up like those of a tired child and went softly about my neck; as her mouth formed my name, but did not utter it; as I bent my head and felt the warmth of her lips, I knew that Campbell was a mere incident.

I felt peculiarly quiet, and for a little while we gazed at each other, as if it were the only thing in the world worth doing.

Then the color flooded back into her cheeks, and her face found refuge on my shoulder again.

I looked over her head toward the hangings, and saw the tips of some one's fingers disappear.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER.

My arms grew limp, all the ardor of their embrace dying out of them as I stared at the place where the fingers had been. I thought I heard the swish of skirts as Margaret, startled by my sudden lack of enthusiasm, looked up.

"What's wrong?" she whispered, drawing away from me.

"Nothing. It's all right. Thought I heard some one coming, that's all."

I led her to the chair I had occupied, and she perched herself upon the arm of it, wonderingly trying to read the riddle in my expression.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost," she told me as I sat down. "And you are quite as white as one."

I put my arms about her, quite surprised at my temerity, and kissed her again and again just to keep her from asking questions. Of course that was not the only reason.

Still, I sensed to whom those vanishing fingers had belonged, and had no wish to create a rumpus by telling Margaret anything about them. Campbell had likened the maid in the Rollins household to a powder-mine; I had no desire to make the spark that would blow it up.

Doubtless the peeping maid had seen what I looked like, and the situation, as she could view it was, to say the least, "rich."

Fortunately, Margaret accepted the kisses in full explanation.

Margaret's eyes were clear and smiling when I left her, and I felt that nothing mattered so long as we two understood each other and were content.

But I boarded an up-town tram with a sensation that I had put my foot in it — the general situation, I mean — and I prayed that Miss Powder-Mine was as careful as she apparently was mercenary. It would not pay her to tell Ralph of my visit. He would only raise the dickens, and she would get into trouble with Campbell; but I would have much preferred that she had not seen me—like that.

The thing bothered me all the way up-town, and when I left the tram I walked in a sort of brown study, trying to imagine the effects my disobedience to orders might have; and then, jumping aside to avoid a little fellow on a small tricycle, I saw a familiar figure, clothed in something dark and clinging, standing on the bottom step at the entrance to Della's apartment.

She was looking in the opposite direction toward the Elevated Railway station, and, before I had time to decide whether to be seen or not, she had stepped down and was walking away.

Alice!

At first I thought that I had made a mistake; it seemed preposterous that Alice should know anything about Della or the Gobbler, but as I walked toward the apartment entrance I realized that I had stumbled upon one more queer twist in an affair that was already contorted sufficiently to make any one's head buzz.

I rang Della's door-bell timidly, and the door was jerked open and Della appeared before me in the semi-darkness of the hall with a suddenness that was truly startling.

"What ye want?" she rasped at me instantly; and then, recognizing me, her voice dropped to a militant mumble. "Oh, it's you, is it? I guess I gotta let you in if she says so. She's the boss."

There was a sneer mingled with her grumbling, and as I entered, thoroughly bewildered, she closed the door behind me with a spiteful bang and a muttered—"Makes me sick!"

"I don't understand," I pleaded, moving along the hall.

"You can't kid me. You wuz waitin' down-stairs for Miss Mac to give you the woid that it wuz all right—'s if it'd make any diff'rence what I said." She laughed mockingly. "Jus' hang up your kelly an' stick roun' 's long as you like. She's runnin' this dump."

It was borne upon me that "Miss Mac" was Alice, though what her relationship to Campbell was puzzled me. Della, apparently, did not entertain high regard for her.

Della crept after me into the living-room. She appeared to hesitate about it and I felt rather than heard her follow.

Passing the Gobbler's bedroom I saw that the nurse had been reengaged, evidently overruling Della's ideas of economy, and I supposed that was another instance of Alice's "bossism," though how she had ever become connected with the affair I could only dimly conjecture.

As Della trailed me into the parlor, which was sandwiched between the dining-room and another offshoot intended for music or a bed, a glance at her sulky face told me that there was something on her mind of which she wanted to be rid.

"You're one of Mac's real swell pals, ain't you?" she demanded sullenly.

"I suppose so."

"What'd he sen' you up here for?"

"I am not going to remain long. Just till this evening."

She looked me over very carefully.

"What did Miss Mac tell you about the kid?"

"Why, nothing."

"Don't try to make a monkey outa me! An' if you've come up here to get a line on how I treats the noice to give Mac an earful I'll slam you one. Get me?"

Her shoulders drooped to an ugly slouch in direct contrast to her chic pearl-gray dress. The curl of her upper lip made her almost brutal.

I made no comment. Evidently she had acquired an entirely wrong conception of the reason for my being there, and I did not suppose I could disillusion her.

Suddenly she swung round and flung this at me:

"You think I ain't in Mac's class, don' you? I'm tough, an' fresh, an' ign'rant. Oh, I'm wise. I know what I am an' what you an' Miss Mac thinks, an' mebbe I ain't got no right to hold him to nuthin'. But I'm gonna jus' the same." A pause, as she caught her breath sharply. "She ain' gonna get him!"

There was an awkward silence.

Apparently I had dropped in at a moment when Della's mind ached for relief from the struggle to be something she knew very well she was not, and she seemed to imagine that I knew a great deal more about it than I did. One thing was certain, "Miss Mac" was not supposed to be Campbell's "sister," so I presumed she might be his "cousin."

"Don't you think you are allowing your antipathy to Miss — er — Miss Mac to carry you too far?"

Instantly Della's slouch became more pronounced, and, judging by the sudden flashing of her eyes, I wished I had not spoken. She studied me intently for fully a minute.

"You got a noive," she declared finally in a very low voice. "What you buttin' in for?"

"I'm not. I merely want you to think—"

"Think! Ain't I been thinkin' for mont's and mont's? Ain't I had to sit by feelin' like dirt under her shoes, lis'nin' to her Fif' Avenoo chatter, knowin' he wuz daffy abou' it, an' gettin' Hail Columbia fr'm him cos I couln' get on to being a lady? W'en he foist came nosin' roun' the kitchen I thought he wuz a god or somethin', an' w'en he saved Beans from the chair—"

"The chair! You mean—"

"Sure. Beans didn' have nuthin' to doin' with it, but they'd ha' put him

away if Mac hadn' ha' butted in wit' the coin for a crackerjack lawyer what proved a alibi. Crabbe an' Paler an' Gregg an' the whole gang's been helped out the same way—"

I nodded, with a clearer understanding of the Rob Roy gang's beginnings.

I did not speak, thinking it better to allow her to get the venom out of her system in her own way. Some one moving about in the hall entered one of the bedrooms, and when a door closed, Della eyed me militantly and asked, as if she were daring me to deny it.

"She's crazy about him, ain't she?"

"You mean Miss Mac?"

"Sure!"

"Why no, I don't think so."

"Aw—tell it to Sweeney. Her? She's daffy abou' him! An' she makes a bluff about wantin' the Gobbler to get all that's comin' to him, w'en she'd put dope in his milk if she'd get away with it. Why, say! That night in Passaic, we'n my sister died, she argued with Mac to beat the ban' about him havin' no right to keep his woid to Nessie 'bout lookin' out for the Gobbler an' keepin' him fr'm being brung up in the kitchen.

"She said me or the kid's dad wuz his nacheral guardian, an' that the lawr didn't give Mac no right to take him away fr'm us. But w'en Mac shut his face tight an' says he had a dooty to get by wit', lawr or no lawr, she closed up like a clam an' didn't say another woid.

"But starch ain't whiter'n she wuz w'en Mac come acrost to me an' ast me to help him give the kid a chanst."

She had made that night at Passaic painfully clear, and I could understand that Campbell's position had been peculiar.

He had been unable to bring Rollins's duty and rights as parent upon the situation, because that meant revealing his identity and endangering the life of Margaret's father. Nor could he break his promise to the child's mother without casting Margaret's half-brother forever into Heaven knows what!

Alice had plainly shown that she had been less eager to protect her uncle's worthless hide. I was quite sure, when she pointed out who the child's natural guardians were, that she did not intend Campbell to think that she meant that Della was the least of two evils.

And he, quixotic idiot that he was, taking up Rollins's burden and keeping his promise to protect the baby from its mother's hereditary environment, had set his face toward the middle course, and proposed the ridiculous union with Della as the simplest way out.

"You gonna be roun' to-night?"

The query startled me from a reverie in which a thought had come to me.

"Yes; till nine-thirty."

"I'll give you them sparks Jimmy's sendin' over 'fore you leave. I gotta a lady frien' comin' to see me roun' nine. She's grabbed a swell feller somewhere's an' wants to give him an airin' an' show me up." A short, forced laugh mocked the assertion. "I guess I don' needa lose any sleep abou' that."

She walked slowly away from me toward the portières, in every line and movement what heredity had made her. The flapping of the hangings behind her was no more listless than she.

It was plain that her passion for Mac did not give her any false ideas about the future with him.

I went to a restaurant for lunch, and when I returned learned from the nurse that Miss Borrowman had gone out.

Taking a peep at the Gobbler, I saw that he was dull-eyed and listless, and mentioning the fact to the nurse, was informed that he had been "nearly poisoned with sour milk"—that he was a little better, and that all Miss Borrowman knew about the care of babies was to pet them and give them paregoric when they cried.

I also learned that "Miss MacGregor" had reengaged her and told her she must not leave again, no matter what Miss Borrowman said; and that the maid had threatened to leave because the nurse had blamed her for feeding the child bad milk.

All of which, doubtless, was the cause of the rumpus and of Della's spitfire mood on my arrival.

That afternoon plodded on toward evening, keeping me in a continual state of unrest, wondering what Campbell wanted with me at the musty ——th Street house. I did not care for the arrangement at all, picturing as I did dark shapes of men lurking about outside, dim lights inside, and people going about on tiptoe, speaking in whispers, with somewhere up-stairs Rollins probably bound and gagged, waiting for whatever Campbell's ingenious mind had in store for him.

Della returned sometime before dark and gave me as wide a berth as the place would allow.

Getting back from the luxury of a shave and a leisurely dinner about a quarter of nine, the maid let me in, and I ambled through to the parlor, to waste half an hour or so, guessing by the light in Della's room that she was dressing to receive her visitors.

I hoped she would not drag me into the reception, and bethought me of the room adjoining the parlor as a means of escape, if my hostess did not appear and give me Margaret's trinkets beforehand.

Presently, as I trifled with a stray volume of Browning, a door opened and closed, and I heard the rustle of silken skirts come along the hall and through the dining-room.

A small hand threw back the portières and Della appeared.

Della—but different. I stared at her in amazement.

Framed in the deep red hangings, clothed in a semidécolletée gown that clung to her supple young figure, glittering fires flashed from out of her wonderful hair, about her throat, her wrists and her fingers.

She was wearing Margaret's jewelry!

CHAPTER XXXI.

BORROWED PLUMES.

I STARTED to my feet, partly in astonishment, but greatly in admiration.

There was still a hint of contempt in her deep-blue eyes.

"Some class to this rig?"

"Good Heavens! You mustn't wear those—those things!"

"Aw—g-wan!"

She came from between the portières and rustled toward the center of the room, moving with perfect ease and grace.

"You can bet your life I'm gonna wear 'em. Fanny ain' gonna put nuthin' acrost on me wit' them sparks lyin' roun' loose."

She turned about and looked over her shoulder to get the back view in the long panel mirror.

"Fits close, don' it? Guess if I kep' my face shut you wouldn' know me fr'm a reg'lar Fif' Avenoo dame. Fanny's on'y comin' in for a minit, jus' to let me lamp her new beau 'fore him an' her goes joy-ridin' somewheres, so you needn' worry. You'll get the sparks in time 'nough."

Realizing the futility of objection, and since I could not take the jewels without personal violence, I sat down again, watching the iridescent flashes come out of her jet-black hair.

There was a diamond-studded bracelet and one of plain gold upon her right wrist. Upon her left was an odd chainlike affair with a diamond-set clasp. The necklace set her throat on fire; a brooch, like a star, twinkled upon her left shoulder, and her fingers sparkled with the assistance of several rings.

As she moved toward a chair, apparently quite satisfied that her friend Fanny would receive the proper sort

of shock, the door-bell rang rather more loudly than was necessary.

Della wheeled toward the portières with the injunction:

"Sit tight. Nobody ain' gonna bite you."

Some one—the maid, I presumed—answered the ring, and the outer door opened and closed. Footsteps and voices sounded in the hall, and Della went to meet them through the dining-room.

"Hello, Fanny," I heard her call presently—"come right in! I gotta frien' o' Mac's here, but he's harmless."

An empty laugh answered, and then:

"Gee! Ain't you swell? You look like Stiffany's on p'rade. Meet my frien' Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown—Miss Borrowman."

"Pleased to meet you," Della acknowledged, and Mr. Brown mumbled something in reply.

Followed a strange silence.

The portières shut it out, and I sat for fully a minute, waiting and wondering what the dickens was wrong.

"Come right in," Della insisted again, and her voice had become suddenly subdued. "You got plen'y time."

"I guess we'd better be on our way," Fanny protested just as Della threw back the hangings, revealing a rather striking blond, who was eying her hostess suspiciously. "Me an' my frien's got a date up the river an'—my Gawd!"

Fanny's exclamation died away in a whisper.

Her rouged lips parted foolishly, and her eyes spoke more eloquently than her tongue.

She gaped at me as if I were a ghost.

And I gaped back at her and over her shoulder at her "swell feller."

He was Ralph Van Huysen!

Instantly I felt icy cold, then unpleasantly warm, and immediately cold again.

Ralph, hat in hand, looked stupid, and for a moment I thought he was going to turn and run. What little color he had died out of his cheeks. His jaw sagged, and he shrank behind Fanny as if he thought she ought to protect him.

Margaret's maid—and I had no doubt upon the question of Fanny's identity—seemed undecided about what course to take; whether to stand or fly; and Della, with Margaret's jewels screaming out all over her, looked from one to the other of us.

It was an impossible situation.

Ralph was afraid of me because I knew of his engagement to Margaret, and I was afraid of him because of the jewelry Della wore and what Fanny had seen that morning when I had disobeyed Campbell's orders and called on Margaret before coming up to Della's.

Fanny was the enigma—the powder-mine. I could not imagine what she thought or would be likely to do.

"What's hit ye?" Della demanded in bewilderment.

"Nuthin', dearie," Fanny replied weakly, but drew nearer to her hostess, with her attention fixed upon the tiara in Della's hair. "You jus' dazzled us, that's all. Them sparks—"

Her voice trailed away, and her eyes, narrowing to pin-points, shifted to the necklace, then with lightninglike swiftness to the odd chain bracelet with the diamond-set clasp on Della's left wrist.

"Gee!" she breathed, and her gaze, swinging slowly and heavily upon me, remained.

"You—you—"

Perhaps the rush of circumstantial evidence choked the rest of it, and for a moment I thought she was going to spring at me. Her eyes said quite plainly what she meant.

They seemed to draw the cold beads of perspiration out upon my forehead and make my knees shake as I slid into my chair, to avoid the accusation and the knowledge in her face, and glanced quickly past her toward Ralph.

He did not move or speak, but he was studying Della in an oxlike fashion. "Queer!" I heard him mutter.

"Say! What's the matter wit'

youse?" Della demanded coarsely. "You're lookin' at me's if—'s if I hadn't nuthin' on."

Her hands went up instinctively to hide her throat, while the color flooded into her cheeks.

Ralph got a better view of the bracelets. I could see at once that they startled him more than the other things. His eyes widened in unbelief, and he moved an impulsive step toward Della and stopped.

"What the devil!" he cried hoarsely, and the rest of what he was going to say died in an incoherent mumble as Fanny slowly turned her head.

"Don' get mad," she cautioned. "That won' do no good."

"Hang it all!" Ralph sputtered. "Aren't they Margaret's?"

"I guess so," Fanny interrupted with terrible precision.

"What's took youse?" Della broke in sharply, lowering her hands from her throat, her face now cloudy and threatening. "You seen Mac's frien' before, or what?"

"I guess I have somewheres," Fanny replied, her upper lips curling. "An' more'n that, too. He's rotten, he is. Makin' love to a sweet goil an' pinchin' her sparks to hand 'em out to—to—"

She did not finish it, but a bomb bursting over Della's head could not have startled her more, and her expression would have been comical but for the lurking antagonism in it. She turned to me for an explanation.

"What's she mean?"

"Sure. Ask him," Fanny taunted. "Ask Mac's frien'. Why, say, when Mac hears o' this he'll throw you both out on your heads. I didn't think you was like that, Della, an' after all Mac done for you, too."

Della's mouth opened, but behind that momentary stupidity there rushed a storm of passionate and savage resentment, whipped forward by the pity in Fanny's tone and expression.

"What—what you tryin' to—to—insinuate?"

"Nothin', dearie; jus' advisin' you not to get too gay with pinched sparks, that's all. My frien' don' wanna start a muss if there ain't no occasion."

"Your frien'! That little shrimp? I thought you wuz past cradle snatching!"

Fanny bit her lip, and, as far as her rouge would allow, went quite white.

"What the deuce is this?" Ralph broke in, and with lightninglike change of mood swung angrily upon his companion. "A trick you've played on me? Bringing me here to be made a fool of? What's Mason doing here and—and those jewels?"

"Don't scrap in here," Della interrupted, her mouth ugly in a sneer. "I didn' think gen'lemen talked like that to a lady. Guess your fellow ain' so swell as you cracked him up to be, Fanny."

"Shut up!" Fanny snapped, wheeling furiously upon her hostess. "You think because you got your hooks on Mac that you are somethin'. Do you know why he promised to marry you? He was sore—that's why—because Miss Alice wouldn't agree with him when he spilled that chatter about the nachural guardian hookin' up with the appointed guardian, so's the Gobbler'd get wot was comin' to him. He was lookin' at her like a guy with a toothache, hopin' she'd kick. She called his bluff, though, and now he's making good, and that's why you're here with stolen sparks and her old clothes. You don't figure in the game—really."

With her head drawn down between her shoulders Della did not stir. I saw her wince as the lashes of truth wound bitingly round her quivering heart.

Some one moved in the hall, stopped, and did not go away.

Ralph stood dazed, shifting his attention from Fanny to Della, while I sat in a stupefied lethargy, perspiring at every pore, yet feeling a chill creep over me as Fanny swung upon me.

"Why don' you say somethin', you boob?" she demanded, her bosom heaving with resentment at being attacked by both Ralph and Della.

"You're a peach of a frien' of Mac's, you are, pinchin' a sweet goil's joolry to hand 'em out to a low-down little—"

A smothered sob and a sound that was half a screech, half a curse, burst from Della's lips as she sprang.

I saw the glittering myriad of lights dancing out of her inky-black hair—saw her rage-distorted face — then Ralph spring between her and her prey.

Fanny screamed and clutched at his shoulder, but he succeeded in grabbing Della's wrists and held her off, though she struggled like a wildcat.

"Lemme go!" she gasped hoarsely, wrenching her right arm free and doing her best to scratch Ralph's eyes out.

But Ralph held on, even when I caught Della's arms from behind, and tried to calm her and draw her away.

He was studying the chain bracelet.

He found and sprang the clasp, and, slipping the bracelet from her arm, jumped backward. Della struggled and writhed in my grasp with fiendish energy, drawing sobbing breaths of a fury that was dangerous.

"I thought so!" Ralph exclaimed, wheeling upon Fanny. "I gave this bracelet to Miss Rollins last year. Our initials are on it. I suppose all the other stuff that little fiend is wearing is Margaret's, too."

Della's struggles ceased with surprising suddenness.

Fanny laid her hand upon Ralph's arm as if to smooth his temper.

"Don' get mad. She'll give 'em up and—"

"Go to the deuce!" Ralph snapped, jerking his arm free. "You and your confounded friends! A crowd of thieves, that's what! I wouldn't be surprised if you helped take the things.

"And what's all that talk about Alice? What Alice? Hang it all! You don't mean to say that my sister is mixed up in anything like this? Confound you! I've a good mind to—"

An unpleasant laugh from Fanny halted him. Her eyes burned and there was a dangerous set to the thin red lines of her lips.

"I'm a thief — eh?" Her voice was threateningly low. "You have the nerve to say that. If I was as low as you are I'd take arsenic. I guess you thought you were foolin' me — didn' you? You'd marry me!"

Another unpleasant laugh made Ralph wince and back away a step.

"Sure you'd marry me! Oh, sure you would—not! You'd hand me the same deal as your uncle — Rollins — handed Nessie Borrowman. You an' him are a pair. You're both rotten. But he's gettin' his an' I've played you for the dog you are, and now I'm through! Get that? Through!"

Ralph was white and trembling, as Fanny sneered at him and ran her eyes over him with all the contempt in the world.

But I only saw that dimly out of the corner of my eye as I watched Della get slowly out of her chair. She had not missed a word.

"Rollins!" It was hardly a whisper. "Rollins ruined my sister! An' you knew!"

Their eyes met, and for a second or two there was fear of what she had done in Fanny's. Della's glowed and her arms were quite rigid. The fat was in the fire with a vengeance.

"Rollins!" Della repeated hoarsely. "The guy that Mac—"

Her head came round slowly, and I flinched before the look she gave me.

She did not continue; there was no need. She knew that the man who had accompanied me to the Clachan was named Rollins, and, summing up the case against me, reminded me silently of the promise I had made her the night she and I had met, and of how I had kept it.

The silence was broken by a child's cry.

In a moment the tiara flashed through space to my feet, and as I stooped to pick it up a bracelet struck my hand. The rest followed ere any of us had a chance to get our breath,

and when the brooch struck me a little under the left eye I hoped there wasn't any more.

There was a rush of rustling skirts.

I straightened and turned about with a hazy conception of Ralph being very near to me, Della rushing through the dining-room, and Fanny, suddenly timid and anxious, following her.

Some one in the hall moved hastily and a door closed. Della did not seem to heed. I heard her rushing to the other end of the hall; another door slammed and the Gobbler wailed louder and longer.

Ralph was very pale and shaking with anger and excitement; his hands were clenched.

Mine were filled with rings and bracelets and the brooch. The tiara and necklace were in my pockets.

"Give me those things!" he demanded.

"Are they yours?"

"They belong to my cousin."

"I'll see that your cousin gets them."

"You—you— Hang you!"

He lunged at me, and, with my hands filled as they were, I could only throw up my arms to ward him off and side-step.

I backed into a small table—upset it. A vase crashed to the floor and I went with it, when Ralph, crazy as a Malay and swearing between his teeth, plunged at me, catching me off my balance with a terrific swing over the left eye.

My head was swimming and the electric chandelier whirling round; and something hard and sharp came up from behind, and the lights grew dim.

In an instant a weight pressed upon my chest, and when I struggled feebly to rise the weight grew heavier. There was nothing distinct.

Millions of miles above me I saw a faint light, and from far off came a child's cry.

A long time afterward the weight upon my chest lifted, and some one flung something wet in my face, grabbed my arm, and, pulling me to my feet, held me there till the mists before my eyes faded, and I saw that she was Fanny.

"Are you a friend o' Mac's?"

I nodded.

"Do you know where Rollins is?"

"I think so."

"Then for Heaven's sake wake up an' get a move on, or there'll be murder this night! Della's gone for Beans Borrowman."

CHAPTER XXXII.

NUMBER 314.

THE next few minutes are very hazy.

"Gone for Beans Borrowman!"

That threat roused me as nothing else could have done; made my bruised eye, the growing lump on the back of my head, and the fact that Ralph had taken advantage of his opportunity to flee with the jewelry matters of secondary importance.

It all lay somewhere behind the shadow that Beans and his revenge cast across the pathway of events.

I could see the Rob Roy gang torn asunder, the blot of murder upon its escutcheon, its members scattered and fleeing from the clutching fingers of the law. Its leader—

I rushed to the telephone and stood upon a red-hot griddle while the operator took centuries to get me the number I wanted. A gruff voice answered my query.

"Mac ain't got here yet."

"Hasn't got there!"

"Naw! Ring off."

Then, because there was nothing else to do, and because inactivity was the one thing I simply could not stand, I got into my hat and coat and out of the apartment to find a taxicab to take me to the ——th Street house.

I don't know what Fanny did or where she went or anything about her. As I went out I had a dim vision of

the nurse and the maid hovering about the hall.

Della had about ten minutes' start, and before I had found a taxi she had been given ten more. But I knew she had to find Beans, while I was traveling directly to the rendezvous; that was the only comfort I had, as the cab, doing its best to earn the bribe I offered, pounded on down-town.

Seated alone, with nothing to do but watch the lights flash past, I had time to paint pictures that were hideous, revolting, and terrible.

The end was inevitable. I felt it in my bones, even though I might prevent the coming of the crisis that night, and I shivered when I thought I might be too late.

I could not imagine, even though I did arrive in time to warn Campbell of his danger, how he was going to get Rollins safely out of the house if it were being watched by Parks's men. Yet moved he must be or else the blood-seeking Beans would kill him.

Stopping the taxi a square away from the house, I hastened down Ninth Avenue feeling anything but brave.

At ——th Street I hesitated for a minute, searching the shadows, fearful of the avenger's approach; then, with an effort, turned and went swiftly toward Eighth Avenue.

The lamps were not very bright; the atmosphere was heavy and sinister.

Yet the place was not so somnolent, after all.

I heard a piano, and some one who could not play the cornet was demonstrating the fact.

Young people flirted upon the bottom steps of the houses; matrons gossiped under a lamp across the street, and a lady in a kimono, leaning out of a first-floor window, held frivolous conversation with a man anxious, late as it was, that she occupy the vacant seat in the little red car drawn up at the carriage-step.

There were two taxicabs further up the street, near Campbell's place. I walked tremblingly toward them, with my eyes about me, and I concluded that some sort of merrymaking was going on in the house before which they stood.

Every room in the place, from the basement to the roof, was ablaze, and a few curious people stood on the sidewalk, apparently waiting for something to happen.

The house next it, in grim contrast, was devoid of light and life. I felt ashamed and afraid of my connection with it; I dreaded to pass the welcome, homelike place—so fearlessly bespeaking its law-abidingness—to dive like a felon into the shadow of Campbell's basement.

I hoped the bright lights were not just next door, and I peered at the numbers of the houses I was passing to learn just how far I had to go.

"No. 318"—the next was not very distinct—but I could trace a six in the one after and presumed it was 316.

I stopped there.

No. 314 was Campbell's number, and that was the house with the lights!

The number, painted slantwise upon the glass panels of the door, glared at me.

Great guns! A detective standing at the Eighth Avenue corner, half a square away, could easily have picked me out of that glare, particularly if I attempted to climb the stairs to the main door.

I could not imagine any one imprisoned there, and as I hesitated, trying to believe that I had not got the numbers mixed, it occurred to me that Rollins had gone.

A wave of relief swept over me, and, remembering how different the Clachan had been on my second visit, I plunged into the basement.

A light foot sounded within, answering my ring at the door-bell. The door swung open and in the semidarkness I saw a white shirt-front glisten, then indistinctly the face of a man with a small black mustache.

"Well?"

"Is this Cam—MacGregor's place?"

"It is. What ya want?"

"I'm Mason. I have an appointment—"

"I guess not. Try the door upstairs."

"Don't be an idiot! Is MacGregor here yet?"

Heavy feet were coming along the hall and a woman's strident voice called:

"What's the trouble, Billy?"

"There's a party here—"

A mass of straw-colored hair and the ample proportions of Rosie Paler pounded into view.

"Gee! Blondy!"

Then in a moment my hopes raced to the skies and I knew that I was first in the race for Rollins's life.

As I hurriedly stepped inside she whispered:

"It's all right, Billy. Beat it."

Billy mumbled to himself and reluctantly departed. Rosie grabbed my arm and led me along the hall and past the dining-room, but not before I caught a glimpse of a table with a snowy-white cloth, much silver and glassware, and flowers as if for a feast.

"Where you been?" Rosie whispered. "It's fifteen after ten."

"Is it?"

"Sure it is. If it weren' that Miss Mac wuz late, too, you'd be in Dutch. An' what'd ye come in the basement way for? You ain't groceries. Beat it—here's the stairs."

Gently but firmly she pushed me ahead, and I climbed the narrow flight, wondering what new insanity Campbell was practising. Reaching the top I looked round the baluster and along the fully lighted hall to the front door. There wasn't a soul in sight, but some one with a deep voice was talking in the parlor.

"He's in there, isn't he?"

"Sure. Go right in. He'll be glad to see ya." Then, looking into my bruised face in the better light: "Gee! What a shiner!"

Clapping her hands over her mouth to smother her laughter, she thrust me toward the parlor portières with the other.

I threw the hangings aside, took one step into the room, and—

Alice Van Huysen was there; Campbell was not.

He of the sonorous voice was a clergyman!

My good eye blinked. The other could not because it was almost closed. Alice started to her feet, but the minister regarded me with careful disapproval.

Outside I heard Rosie Paler making great haste toward the stairs, laughing; and as she went up another flight, two or three steps at a time, I had a suspicion regarding the whereabouts of Campbell.

Somehow or other I could not say anything or think for a minute or so. I must have looked stupid and wild. I know I felt much worse than that.

"What's wrong?" Alice cried. "You look as if—as if—well, can't you see how you look?"

Since I was facing the mantel mirror I could see quite plainly, and the sight was not a pretty one.

My left eye, as I have said, was almost closed — puffed up and greenish blue. My mustache was scattered to the four winds of heaven, and my hat, because of the throbbing lump at the back of my head, was tilted sidewise, giving me a truly giddy appearance.

I removed it, conscious for the first time of my wretched manners, and discovered that my hair was disreputably tousled.

Both Alice and the minister studied me queerly in silence; the former threatening to smile, the latter with a measure of embarrassment. I opened my mouth to say something apologetic, heard a footstep on the stairs, and wheeled without a word and went back into the hall.

Ere I had gone three steps I halted as if some one had caught my coat-tail and pulled me back on my heels.

Campbell, in a quiet, brown business suit, was descending the stairs.

With him was Margaret.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CLANSMAN.

For a little while I could hardly believe that they were real.

Gradually I saw that Margaret wore something blue with a splash of gray in it. Her hand lay lightly upon Campbell's arm, and while she appeared to cling to him, she did not seem nearly so much put out as I.

Rosie Paler followed, trying to look very solemn.

"Hello, Didderington! Found a job yet?"

Campbell's deep tones of greeting laughed at me, though his expression was as solemn as an owl's. Then he and Margaret both seemed to understand that there was something wrong; and at closer quarters they saw my left eye and dishevelment.

Margaret's hand slipped from her escort's arm.

"What on earth have you been doing?" Campbell demanded, midway between laughter and amazement. "In a taxi wreck?"

"Not quite. They know."

I tried to make my single eye say the rest of it, but Campbell did not seem to understand.

"They know? Who knows? And what?"

"Beans."

To Margaret it must have sounded idiotic, and her expression of doubt was almost funny. Campbell's eyes widened a little, but that was all.

"You mean they know—"

"Who Smith is and where to find him."

Campbell smiled.

I never saw any one smile just like that. It was cruel, but the relief in it was the most surprising thing of all. In fact, I hardly believed he quite appreciated just how serious it was.

"Bu—but Della—she's gone for him—man, to bring him here! They know he's here, don't they?"

Margaret's face underwent a hundred changes of expression in a minute. She hadn't the faintest idea of what we were talking about. Campbell's lips merely tightened over that enigmatical smile, and, half turning about, said quietly to Rosie:

"Tell Billy not to let any one in until after the minister is gone. No one at all—not even the Borrowmans. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"After he leaves it doesn't matter. Tell Billy that."

"I will."

Rosie rushed toward the basement stairway.

"Come on," Campbell invited me, without winking an eyelash. "'Just as you are, without one plea.' Your time has come."

The succeeding minutes—I don't know how many there were—ought to be chronicled by some one else.

I know very little about them.

Faintly do I recollect standing with Margaret facing the minister, mumbling responses and hearing my bride whisper hers. I did not see her half the time, because she stood on my left side, and the whole business was just as hazy as the things I could see out of my left eye.

Alice and Campbell and Rosie were somewhere about, and I found the ring in my hand at the proper time without knowing how it came there.

Then, after I had kissed Margaret for the first time in public, I knew that we were married. The minister said so, and gave us a certificate to prove it, after everybody but Rosie had signed their names.

Rosie, I believe, was very much surprised and a little awed when she learned, in the course of the ceremony, that I was an earl; and when it was all over I heard her mutter:

"Gee! An' I kissed—" She

stopped, colored, and backed away, probably remembering that my wife was about.

Wife!

I could scarcely believe it, not even when Campbell's hand came out of the mist and seized mine. He looked me in the eye, smiled, and growled from the depths of him:

"Take good care of her. I think you are both worth it."

Then, as Alice offered her congratulations, Campbell wrote a check for the minister, who, looking askance at me, blessed the whole shooting match and said he was sorry he could not wait. The women departed up-stairs shortly after he had gone, and hardly had the hangings fallen behind them ere Campbell wheeled with amazing rapidity toward the sliding doors that shut out the back parlor.

In an instant they were thrown back.

I stared, wide-eyed, past Campbell's arm, motionless, gasping for breath. Then I laughed. I could not help it.

One gas-jet burned low, and seated directly under it were three men.

Crabbe was one, Paler the other.

Their solitary eyes gleamed upon the third, and in their right hands each carried a glistening weapon.

In the center was Rollins—gray with fear and shivering—in kilts!

He was in full Highland costume, even to the cairngorm-hilted dirk in his sock. A silver-mounted cairngorm thistle-brooch held his flowing plaid in place, and a glengarry was perched at an approved angle upon his head.

The glaring yellow and red of the alien tartan seemed to spread all over him; everywhere but over the naked whiteness of his knees, which knocked together in his terror.

I never saw a man more ludicrous or so unhappy. He was a study in misery.

Paler and Crabbe did not smile. Their expressions were deadly unemotional.

"Our friend is now a full-fledged clansman," Campbell advised nonchalantly, gripping the edge of the sliding doors in an idle fashion. "He is armed to the teeth and ready to kill. That's what the red in the tartan means. The yellow speaks for itself, and suggests why we prefer his room to his company.

"When we are ready his guardians shall lead him to the front door, which they shall open for him. He will then be at perfect liberty to pass out, descend the steps, and enter a waiting taxi."

Rollins squirmed and found courage to glare at me. His tormentors were not in the least moved, one way or another. Their calm was terrible.

"I believe there are some friends of his somewhere outside," Campbell resumed. "I can't just say where they are, but Mr. Parks was at the corner as I came in. If our clansman cares to walk that far in his present costume to solicit aid against us, we will be agreeably surprised, as it will prove that he has more courage than we believed. Then again, as he descends the steps, he may be recognized. If he is, we shall submit without a struggle."

Rollins appeared to understand perfectly. He did not attempt to speak or to object in any way. That sort of thing had been entirely knocked out of him. All he appeared to care about was to get into more comfortable raiment.

With an eye upon him and another upon the portièred entrance of the parlor, and listening for the ring upon the door-bell that would herald Beans's arrival, I heard Campbell continue in the same easy strain:

"He has our advice upon his movements and actions when he leaves here, and I would like to add that the man who is looking for Smith knows who Smith is, and is coming here presently to look for him."

Rollins started an inch or two out of his chair, and his cheeks grew gray. He sagged back again and cowered into the folds of his plaid.

"Since silence is generally conceded

to mean consent," Campbell resumed relentlessly, "it is to be presumed that he had no objection to the ceremony he heard performed a few minutes ago. A parent's consent is always nice to have in affairs of that sort. Paternal generosity is much nicer. So he has kindly assigned to his daughter—to take effect upon the occasion of her marriage to — well — anybody — the mortgages he held upon the estates of Didderington.

"The paper was carefully drawn by that eminent practitioner of law, Mr. Seton Tait, who arranges legal words and phrases so that they can't be split with an ax. Our guest signed it, feeling that he—might as well—and stayed to be sure that everything was all right. Of course, the costume he has affected for the occasion made him rather backward about making an appearance.

"And, by the way, Didderington, I believe Smith & Nelson, of Broad Street, have a few dollars for you, made on the sale of one thousand shares of Rand Island at 225."

I was dumfounded. Even Rollins was so startled as to forget his fear and again rise a few inches out of his chair, and a queer sound, half whine, burst from his pallid lips.

But he slid back again instantly and cringed away from the menacing touch of his guards' revolvers.

Campbell eyed him up and down, and seemed to be talking just for the personal satisfaction of being sure that Rollins would understand exactly what had happened and how all of his various plans had failed.

"My agents borrowed fifty thousand shares from the gentleman in San Francisco who owned them and gave security of five million dollars—or double what the stock was worth. Since my guest bought the stuff, I can't return it, and, of course, forfeit the security. But I think that the balance of what was realized upon the sale of fifty thousand shares at 250 should make a certain very young man independent of his guardians, whoever they may be."

Of course, I knew that he meant the Gobbler.

He reached out for the other half of the sliding door. Rollins had not a word to say; did not make a sound of any kind.

"When I give the word, boys. Not till then."

Crabbe nodded, and the door slid together in a second, shutting out the splash of red and yellow, the pallor of Rollins's cheeks, and the glint of his keepers' weapons. The last glimpse of the tableau I had was the rakish tilt of the glengarry upon Rollins's head.

Campbell gripped my arm and, leading me toward the parlor entrance, said quietly:

"When you undertook to play the market yesterday, I phoned Smith & Nelson for you, telling them to sell. Thought you might not know when. But I imagined I'd like to see if it made any difference to Margaret and you. Tell me how it all happened—that eye and everything. It wasn't Beans who—"

The basement bell rang.

Ere the sound had died away Campbell had reached the sliding doors and had thrown them back.

"Quick! You've just a minute!"

Crabbe and Paler started to their feet, clutched Rollins's arms, and hoisted him out of his chair before he had much of a chance to even gasp.

The basement door closed.

Taking charge of his prisoner, Campbell ordered Crabbe and Paler to the main stairs.

"The second they show, cover them," he finished ominously, unceremoniously hustling my grotesque and shrinking father-in-law across the parlor, out into the hall, and toward the outer door. Instantly I saw his plan.

As Beans and Della came in from below, he was sending Rollins out from above. It was better, under the circumstances, to let the Borrowmans in than keep them out.

Crabbe and Paler took up their positions on the stairway.

Rollins's knees threatened to give way. There was no fight in him, and Campbell practically dragged him to the door, though the sound of rushing feet in the hall below made a chill creep down my spine.

Some one came pounding up the basement stairs, and in the second or two that I turned my head to see that Crabbe and Paler were quite ready for the intruders, a lot of red and yellow was suddenly pushed out into the vestibule.

The door closed, and Campbell stood with his back to it.

I thought I heard dim sounds of laughter come from the street, but I may have been mistaken; and, in any case, I lost them in a sudden growling command from the stairs:

"Put up your hands!"

Beans, rounding the baluster, jerked back upon his heels, almost as if a bullet from one of the glittering muzzles so near his head had actually hit him.

His dusty face was black as thunder, and his eyes, sweeping about him like lightning—at me—at Campbell—and up at the men who were so calm it seemed to hurt—shrank from the command in their hands.

For just a second he hesitated, then his arms rose slowly to the accompaniment of much unpleasant vituperative that isn't worth repeating, and he marched in sullen anger at the order toward the center of the hall, followed by the evil-eyed Crabbe.

Paler hung back, waiting for Della; and I thought perhaps she had been afraid to come up.

Crabbe, slapping Beans's pockets in the most matter-of-fact fashion, extracted a murderous-looking revolver.

"It's all right, Beansy," Crabbe assured him. "Mac helped you out once, an' I'm jus' helpin' him do it again. If you wanna croak the guy, do it where it won't harm nobody but him an' you."

A dull flush crept over Beans's face and forehead. Campbell, with his hands in his pockets and showing little signs of perturbation, left his post at the door and came walking leisurely forward.

Crabbe gave him Beans's revolver, which he carefully "broke," and, extracting the charges, handed it back to its owner just as I caught a suggestion of millinery and petticoats at the top of the main stairway, and heard, without a doubt this time, laughter and jeers come from the street.

"Not here," Campbell declared very quietly. "I don't allow—"

A muffled roar from without drowned the rest of it, and it was followed by a shriek that, in the dark silences of the nights, I hear again and shudder.

There was another shot, and then a third.

Then a moment of awful quiet that chilled.

Beans smiled.

In an instant, with his lips drawn tightly together and his eyes aflame in wrath and amazement mingled, Campbell wheeled sharply to the door, and, choking in horrified expectancy, fearfully glancing toward the stairs, I followed him.

A screaming riot had risen without.

I was probably a foot behind Campbell when he reached the vestibule, but I think he jumped the steps to the sidewalk, as windows flew up and heads popped out and heavy feet and three heavy men sprang into the limelight from opposite directions.

Midway down the steps I stopped and looked down in shrinking horror upon a kilted figure lying huddled and still beside the open door of a taxicab.

And there was a wild-eyed, tousled-haired girl hysterically screaming at a stoop-shouldered, bearded man who brandished a smoking revolver.

"Beat it, dad, for Gawd's sake!"

But old man Borrowman ignored the advice. Instead, he stood frothily daring Rollins to get up.

Rollins did not get up—did not move.

The yellow and red plaid fluttered a little; that was all.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HIDE AND SEEK.

CAMPBELL literally jumped upon the drunken murderer, sending him against the front wheel of the taxi, and wrenched the revolver from him as if it were no more dangerous than the Gobbler's teething-ring.

Then, almost brutally pushing Della aside, he stooped over Rollins.

Parks arrived a second later.

Ere Borrowman recovered his balance or had gathered any sort of understanding about what had hit him, one of the other detectives had seized and handcuffed him. The third caught Della from behind; but, seemingly undecided about how to regard her, satisfied himself with simply gripping her arms, an attention which, peculiarly enough, she made no effort to resist, but stood dumbly watching Campbell and Parks bend over Rollins.

A third man joined them; I learned later that he was a doctor from across the street.

There were people racing in upon the scene from all directions. Two policemen forced their way to the center of activity, and one of them instantly turned about to call an ambulance.

Alice, dressed to depart, was somewhere on the steps behind me. Crabbe and Paler and Rosie and Beans were crowded in the vestibule, and Billy had come to the basement door. But the vestibule was emptied in a few seconds.

Rosie came farther down the steps; the men went the other way; and as I heard them making themselves scarce down the basement stairs, I felt a small hand creep into mine and, turning my head sharply, found Margaret, coated and hatted at my elbow.

In that second, right or wrong, I decided that she must not know that the kilted figure on the sidewalk was that of her father, and subconsciously I put my arm about her and tried to lead her back into the house.

"Let's go inside."

"Wait," she whispered, and crept nearer to me. "Is he dead?"

As if in reply, the doctor bending over Rollins looked up, and Campbell and Parks straightened slowly and simultaneously.

They came face to face.

Parks nodded toward the thing at his feet.

"In Boston, eh?"

His voice was quite cold.

Campbell ignored the insinuation completely.

"Mebbe ye'd better tak'—this," he suggested broadly, and held out the murderer's revolver. "You're a plain-clothes polisman, aren't ye?"

Parks snatched the weapon angrily out of Campbell's hand, and a choked-off scream came from behind them.

Della was struggling in her captor's grasp like a mad thing.

"You'd t'row us down!" she screeched. "You'd t'row us to the bulls!"

Parks smiled and waited.

Campbell studied the frantic Della for a few seconds, then turned and came leisurely toward the steps.

Parks made no move to halt him. He was regarding the prisoners with an eye to their usefulness, just as he had done Mrs. Varelli that morning.

Della quieted instantly. The rage went out of her face as if Campbell's look had been a magic wand.

But her father was a different matter. He was partly intoxicated, for one thing; and Della's angry screech had evidently awakened his befuddled mind to a full understanding of his position.

"T'row us to the bulls?" he questioned thickly, as if he were repeating it to know what it meant by the sound of it.

"Shut yer face!" Della snapped.

Parks waited a little longer, though

it seemed to cause him an effort, and Campbell reached the third step of the stairs as Borrowman, answering his daughter's advice with an oath, raised his handcuffed hands and pointed an accusing finger at the Gregarach.

"You done f'r me!" he exploded hoarsely, as if it had just occurred to him. "You took my gun an' t'rowed me down!" More frothy oaths that allowed Campbell to reach the fifth step. "I'll fix ye! I've got your number! If they're gonna pull me, they're gonna pull you—Mr. Rob Roy!"

Campbell had reached the seventh step, upon a level with Margaret, Alice, and I.

"Stop!"

Parks sprang forward, and his right hand, bearing Borrowman's revolver, came up sharply.

With a wild scream, a small female figure leaped out of a startled detective's grasp and, in a twinkling, fastened herself upon Parks's right arm, while another, who did not scream, but whose cheeks were deathly white, threw herself between Campbell and any bullets that might happen to come along.

"Go, Bob; go!"

The words were lost in the roar of the crowd; but I heard a deep laugh, and had a vision of an enormous figure leaping up the steps and filling the vestibule for a second.

"Gude nicht—Mr. Polisman!"

And the front door of No. 314 closed with a bang just as Parks, free from Della's hold, bounded up the steps.

Confusion!

Everything happened in a minute.

There were people everywhere, yelling and running and getting in the way of the detectives and two more policemen, who practically fought their way into the midst of things.

Della, recaptured and handcuffed, was turned over to one of them; the other took charge of the frothing Borrowman, who was screaming to Parks:

"Grab him, mister! Grab him!"

Then Parks's two subordinates joined him with a rush as he was rattling the door at a great rate.

Rosie came farther down the steps, grinning.

Alice, white and anxious, came near to Margaret and me, and we stood huddled together, waiting to see to what length Parks would go. We were ignored almost completely, probably because we were mostly ladies, and because Parks was after bigger game.

"Watch the basement!" he thundered to those below, and the basement door clanged.

No one came out.

There was a crash of breaking glass as Parks smashed the panel of the door with the butt of the revolver.

In another half minute he had rushed into the hall, followed by the others, all with revolvers drawn, ready for unpleasantness.

Not a sound greeted them—nothing.

They became very cautious, as if they thought Campbell might be hiding behind the hat-rack. Then, when they had poked their heads into the parlor and the room of Rollins's late imprisonment, they scurried about the hall, at a loss whether to go up or down.

Parks decided to go down, and took a companion along. The other stayed to watch the stairs.

In the face of desperate men, that descent of the basement stairway would have been nothing short of suicide, and Parks had every reason to believe that he was in the den of clever and unscrupulous criminals.

Down they went, carefully, slowly, prepared for anything.

And all that took time — precious minutes that were beyond price to the man they were after.

In the pause that their absence created, while I listened for the sound of strife, I looked about me; at the seething crowd that was growing to alarming dimensions; at the grisly thing upon the sidewalk, now covered with a white sheet; at Della, placid

once more, and her father, mumbling drunkenly to the policeman who held him.

And near the old murderer, almost brushing arms with Della, was Beans.

I drew a sharp breath and my good eye opened wide.

How he had come there so swiftly was a problem that staggered me, and at the same time led me to hope; and I almost laughed outright at the thought of Parks searching so carefully and cautiously an empty house.

All at once Alice laid her fingers on my arm.

"You know who that is?" she asked, and shot a glance toward the shroud beside the taxicab.

Margaret jerked her head up, and catching the wonder in my face, whispered:

"Who is it?"

I gulped once, looked toward Alice in some bewilderment, and heard her say very quietly:

"Your father, dear. When the detectives come back let me explain, and don't say a word."

"My—"

Margaret drew away from me slowly and stared at one glistening shoebuckle that protruded from beneath the sheet. She shuddered, and I thought she was going to fall, but ere my fingers had touched her arm she steadied herself and, trembling violently, moved slowly down the steps just as Parks came pounding up the basement stairs alone.

"Eighth Avenue!" I heard him shout to the detective on watch in the hall. "There's an alleyway to them flats next to Schmidt's saloon. Caffney just grabbed one of the gang goin' over the back wall."

They came out and down the steps like an avalanche, and the crowd cheered and broke before the rush they made toward Eighth Avenue; and most of the people followed them, yelling all sorts of surmises, with the name "Rob Roy" sounding high above the din.

Margaret paused just long enough to allow them to pass, then, without a word, went down to the sidewalk.

We followed instantly.

Alice's action, brutal it seemed to me, was puzzling; but the whole business was so queer and tangled, and the excitement so intense that I could not think out anything that was in the least involved.

The doctor who had first examined Rollins leaned against the taxi, waiting, I supposed, for the arrival of the ambulance. A policeman, using his night-stick freely, kept the space before the house cleared, while his two brothers in uniform waited with their prisoners and helped him at the same time.

The moment we reached the street the policeman holding Della barked:

"Where you goin'?"

And another equally gruff voice from behind and above us called harshly:

"Hold them! Guess Parks 'll want to talk to the English guy."

Proving that I had not gone unnoticed.

I turned my head and saw a detective, whom I presumed was Caffney, leading Billy down the steps.

Margaret glanced up into my face and gripped my arm almost painfully. She was white to the lips and shaking as with ague, but she crossed the space to her father's side without a second's hesitation, taking Alice and me along.

In an instant there was a policeman ready to push us back.

"One moment, officer," I objected as calmly as I could. "This is his daughter."

"Cut the con, English!" some one said roughly behind me, and I wheeled instantly with the blood rushing to my head.

"You confounded—"

"Still as coarse as ever, Caffney?" a smooth, quiet voice upon Margaret's other side broke in, and the detective's jaw dropped.

He almost released his hold upon

Billy at the sight of Alice's set face, then free from its habitual hint of humor.

"You haven't forgotten me, have you?"

Evidently he hadn't.

Margaret was gazing dully at what lay at her feet, and creeping closer to me every second.

"I can't look!" she whispered. "I can't!"

"I suppose there will be certain formalities before we may take charge of the body?" Alice asked with a calm that was chilly.

"Yes, ma'am," Caffney answered.

"Thank you. I suppose you are under Detective Parks's orders?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well. We'll wait till the ambulance comes. Tell Detective Parks that, please. You know where to find me at any time."

Caffney drew away, dragging Billy with him; and leaving him in the care of the policeman who held Borrowman, strode past us toward Eighth Avenue.

Pandemonium and chaos were mingled there, and the swaying mass of humans grew larger and larger every moment. Every little while a shout would go up and die away in a groan.

Jeers and catcalls, questions and shouted answers, the clanging of tram gongs, traffic disorganized, more and more policemen — all about the capture of a single man whose name floated hither and thither incessantly.

Every few minutes I imagined it was all over, and when we went slowly back to the steps to listen and watch and wait, my head was humming and throbbing, and though I tried to catch Alice's eye and to understand her, I failed in both endeavors, just as I failed to guess at what the end would be.

Margaret huddled very near to me, shivering and looking everywhere but toward the curb. Her eyes were tearless, and she breathed as if her throat were dry and hard.

Above us Rosie leaned against the baluster and seemed quite satisfied about the outcome. Della was alternately watching us and Eighth Avenue like a hawk, and Beans had shifted his position nearer to his father, who was mumbling to himself.

In the midst of the mob toward Eighth Avenue Campbell's escape would either be screened or choked, and once, as a yell went up and the crowd surged into ——th Street, I felt sure that the end had come.

But it was only the ambulance and the police-patrol making a path as they came clanging up the street.

Parks, followed by a policeman, came heavily through the crowd, elbowing people right and left.

The detective was puffing and blowing as a result of his exertions; he came directly toward us, ignoring the proceeding of placing Rollins's body in the ambulance.

Alice spoke first.

"You are Detective Parks?" she asked.

"I am," very gruffly. "Are you Miss Van Huysen?"

Alice's nod was barely perceptible.

"Caffney tell you?"

"Yes, miss; but I guess you've got yourself mixed up with a bad bunch this time. This lady—Miss Rollins?"

"Not now. She has just been married to this gentleman, who is her cousin, the Earl of Didderington. The ceremony was only completed a few moments before her father left. He seemed to be afraid of something, and insisted upon the marriage taking place down here, because he was hiding from some one and wanted it to come off before he sailed for Europe.

"Mr. MacGregor and he were great friends, I believe, and I think it was Mr. MacGregor who suggested the Highland costume as a disguise, but I know very little about their intimacy. Please try to make it as easy for us as you can. You know where to find us at any time, and if you wish me to, I shall only be too glad to an-

swer any questions and help you all I can in the terrible business."

She spoke so rapidly and so convincingly that Parks did not have either a chance or, apparently, the inclination to interrupt, and he was no more surprised than Margaret and I. There was a trace of Campbell in Alice's prevarications; a twisting of the truth which only one man could have questioned, and he was dead.

Parks looked at me, at Margaret, then back to Alice.

"He is the Earl of Diddering-thing?"

"Didderington," Alice corrected. "He has been using the name Mason to avoid publicity. You've met him before, haven't you?"

The detective's face clouded for a moment, probably at a memory.

"How did that Varelli woman happen to seee you with MacGregor last Saturday night?" he questioned me sharply.

"Rollins was to have met me down there, but he didn't turn up," I answered, taking a leaf from Alice's book. "I told you I hadn't the faintest idea—"

"All right," came the interruption heavily, and there were a few moments of agonizing hesitation that seemed to concern me principally. "Well, I guess I can't hold you. Getting married ain't a crime."

Then he touched my arm, nodded toward Margaret, and his voice dropped suddenly.

"Get her out of this. She's goin' to faint in a minute. I guess I can find you if I want you. Good night."

And he turned sharply upon his heel to issue orders as rapidly as his tongue could move, while I blessed the condition that gained privileges for Fifth Avenue and Berkley Square whether they told the truth or not.

Alice did not hesitate a moment, but hurried us unchallenged and unchecked to the taxi which had waited for Rollins. A policeman clearing a path for us opened the door.

A buzz of comment went up as I gave the chap the direction to my hotel, intending to get some of my baggage there and move on elsewhere. I had a glimpse of Della and Beans watching us across the great gorge of class distinction, the former sneering, the latter sullen.

The ambulance drew out with its ghastly burden as we crowded into the cab and our chauffeur took advantage of the lane it made to follow it quickly out.

He drove toward Eighth Avenue, and through the window I saw a small army of detectives and policemen dispersing the crowd and keeping watchful eyes upon the entrances to a number of flats in which Campbell was believed to be secreted.

I hoped he had got out—hoped it fervently—and that he was putting as many miles between himself and Parks as possible. His days as Rob Roy were over. Of that much I was sure as we trundled away from that scene of turmoil and disaster, none of us seemingly very anxious to speak.

Alice, though white and tight of lip, had given no sign that she was in the least disturbed about Campbell's safety; at least, not after Parks had failed to find him in the house.

Margaret clung to me. There was no sign of a tear; nothing save an agonizing question in her eyes.

Her lips moved silently, as if she were saying the question over to herself before letting us hear.

"Why—were they chasing—"

"Don't, dear. Not to-night, please. It's all right. Everything."

Her breath caught sharply, and I thought she smothered a sob as she looked abruptly out of the window.

Finally the cab stopped.

"Just a few minutes," I whispered; and before I could open the door a gold-laced starter had performed the service for me.

The second I reached the sidewalk I knew there was some mistake.

It wasn't my hotel at all.

"What the dickens!" I began, approaching the chauffeur. "Didn't I give you—"

I stopped.

Our chauffeur's hand came out to me, palm downward.

"There's nae chairge, ye sassenach. Gude keep ye baith. Gude nicht."

Campbell!

CHAPTER XXXV.

RIDING INTO DANGER.

BEFORE I had time to take stock of anything more than the miserable black mustache that covered his upper lip the cab was moving away.

For one gasping second I thought he was carrying my bride away, and the next found her at my elbow trying to smile as I stood blinking down at her and after the podgy vehicle rattling off toward Fifth Avenue.

How Campbell had managed it I could not imagine, but I quickly appreciated that nerve was the principal ingredient toward his success; and remembering the horde of policemen and detectives that had been all about the cab, the thing became funny, or ludicrous, if you will, and serious as everything was I could barely restrain my enjoyment of the "joke."

"Let's go somewhere and have your eye fixed," I heard Margaret whisper.

"You can't go into the hotel like that."

"No," I agreed. "Can't go in at all without baggage. What the deuce did he drop us here for?"

"Everything's here," she murmured, moving away from the questioning scrutiny of the starter and a passer-by. "Mr. Campbell had it moved from your old place to-day—mine too. There is a drug-store across the street."

We went across to the chemist's, and one of the chaps there doctored my eye and sold me a patch to cover its unsightliness; after which, with my head hardly less painful than it had been, thought I stoically kept my hat at a respectable angle, we repaired to the hotel, where we found that Campbell, in his arrangements to defeat all of Rollins's schemes, had left nothing undone, even to the last detail of engaging a suite for us.

As we ascended in one of the elevators I came to the unhappy conclusion that Margaret and I had been but pawns in a game that had necessarily to end with the social or physical annihilation of one of the players.

The ending was written in Margaret's face, and the moment we were alone she lurched, rather than walked, to a chair, and, cowering into its friendly depths, shook from head to foot in a paroxysm of fear and horror—with her fingers in her ears.

I went to her at once, and, putting my arms about her, tried to comfort her and lead her mind away from the ghastly memory upon it.

But still she shivered, tearless and white—with her fingers in her ears.

"I can—hear him—scream!" she whispered.

The morning papers were full of it—of the murder, the mob, the melodramatic escape of the leader of the notorious Rob Roy gang, the "inefficiency of the police," the histories of Della, her father, and his victim, and of our marriage and Alice's explanation of it.

The accounts were hopelessly jumbled, so that the "man in the street" had about a dozen stories from which to pick and choose and draw his own conclusions of a very tangled affair.

But old man Borrowman's reason for the shooting was always the same.

It told plainly, with the addition of several reportorial frills of what Rollins had been guilty, and every newspaper, without a single exception, made the circumstance agree with the "something" of which Alice had said her uncle was afraid.

My morning was rather restless,

and I spent most of it keeping away the reporters and explaining to Margaret several matters, by no means pleasant, but which necessarily had to be made clear to her.

I told her of the Gobbler, of the marriage Campbell had contemplated, of the fate of her jewelry, and the origin of my bad eye—everything but the fact that her father had plotted for my life.

When I had completed the lines of her mouth were a little hard. Her fingers gripped mine listlessly, and even the ringing of a telephone-bell did not send the dull, pained look out of her eyes.

I rose and, going to the instrument, called quietly:

"Hello!"

"Hello! Diddèrington?"

"Yes." I did not have to ask to whom the deep bass voice at the other end of the wire belonged.

"Mrs. Van Huysen would like to have your apologies and those of the countess. Come right over, will you?"

"Just a minute."

I turned toward Margaret.

"Your aunt wants us to go over and apologize. Shall we?"

"Not to apologize," she answered, and her lips closed firmly upon it.

"The countess says she won't apologize," I told Campbell. "Upon that understanding we shall be over immediately."

A soft laugh came along the wire.

"Good! Make it in ten minutes."

We ran the gantlet of inquisitive eyes going out of the hotel and into the Van Huysens's.

There were reporters lying in wait, and a more than usual crowd of the sort of people who seem to have nothing else to do except to take a violent interest in other people's affairs.

Randor, imperturbable as usual, let us in and showed us into the morning-room, where we found Alice alone; and, as she rose to smile us welcome, I saw that there was a doubt upon her mind about something or other.

She avoided all reference to the previous evening's happenings, said her mother would be down in a few moments, and for those few moments I felt peculiarly ill at ease, as if something should happen, but didn't.

Just as I was on the point of asking her about the nurse and maid the door opened, and my single eye hurriedly avoided meeting the entrance of Mrs. Van Huysen, whose pallor was accentuated by the black of the gown she wore, but whose eyes and voice tried to make light of her ordeal.

Behind her came — the nurse with the Gobbler!

And then Campbell.

Margaret ran forward, to be swept into a motherly embrace; and while I stood aside, feeling uncommonly uncomfortable, my wife was introduced to her half brother, who did not seem to care a rap about it.

Alice and her mother circled about the "ceremony," seemingly surprised that Margaret asked no questions about the boy, and I found Campbell suddenly very near to me.

He nodded toward the door and I followed him out of the room into another — the library — which was far enough away to give us the strictest privacy, and, judging by the careful way in which my companion closed the door, he evidently had something very important to say.

There was no sign of Ralph.

"How did you manage that last night?" I demanded at once.

He grunted derisively, and, in spite of the suggestion in his manner that the explanation was an awful fag, he told me that his chauffeuring rig-out had been in the kitchen where he had shed it when he got into the house. And he entered the same way as he went out—by way of Schmidt's saloon on Eighth Avenue.

A ladder over the back wall and an alleyway to Schmidt's back door formed the principal means of exit, and he had to get into his leathern coat, leggings, and wigs on the way.

"Schmidt hasn't had the saloon long," he added dryly. "About two years. He got it when I took the house, or I took the house when he got the saloon, whichever you prefer."

"You mean the place is yours?"

"No. But I found it convenient to help put Schmidt into it, and his gratitude allows us to use his back door.

"By the way, I'm afraid Parks is going to bother you. He is coming to interview Alice in a few minutes — telephoned quite nicely less than half an hour ago, and I'm sure he would not trouble her this early if he had not learned something worth while. There is only one link missing in his chain, and I think he is coming here to frighten Alice into forging it.

"If she won't, he'll try to use Margaret and you. You see, I'm afraid he has learned, or will learn very soon, that Miss MacGregor and Miss Van Huysen are the same person. The culprit is our friend Beans."

"What?"

Campbell nodded his head slowly, and his mouth tightened.

"Yes. Remarkable, isn't it? He is as blind as a bat to his own interests. His type usually are when they imagine they are being ill-treated, and where he leads there are fifty of the smaller fry who will follow, believing their necks are in danger.

"Crabbe and Paler and most of their crews have already left the city. The Clachan was closed by the police this morning. Andy, the bartender, is being held on suspicion. The rest, like rats, are leaving the sinking ship, for which I don't blame them in the least. In a case of this sort it is every man for himself 'an' the de'il tak' the hin'most.' But to get back to Lieutenant Beans.

"Unfortunately, he met Alice, the nurse, and the baby and I as we were leaving the Cathedral Parkway apartment last night. That was after we left you. He was clever enough to suspect that I might be likely to do something of the sort, or perhaps Della whispered the suspicion to him. In any case, he raised a deuce of a row because I insisted that the Gobbler would be cared for by Rollins's people.

"That shooting, Didderington, canceled everything—everything!"

He rose impatiently, his face clouding with a shadow of the anger he had felt when his plan for Rollins's safety had miscarried.

"I won't raise a finger or a dollar to save Borrowman, and I won't be threatened into doing so. No man can kill on my door-step and get me to help him escape the penalty. Beans knows that. I told him so last night, and had to knock him down to prevent that revolver of his from doing any harm.

"There is only one way out of this. You must forge Parks's last link. You will avoid all sorts of trouble if you tell Parks what he wants to know; not only trouble for yourself, but every one else — the girls particularly. Of course, you could perjure yourself and lie a blue streak, but with your responsibilities you can't afford to take a chance of being caught at that.

"Alice can take care of herself. Seton Tait will look after Della, because her life is only beginning; and I think, apart from what she did for me last night, she ought to have a chance. The others—well, I shall attend to them.

"But I can't do a thing for you to get you and Margaret cleanly out of this mess. I dragged you into it, but you must get yourself out—and take the Gobbler with you."

He looked sharply at me from under lowering eyebrows, while I sat aghast, incapable of solving either his argument or his indifference to the coming of Parks.

"You will sail next Wednesday—after the funeral — and the Gobbler and his nurse shall sail with you. The nurse is an old member of the family —took care of Margaret when she was a kiddie, so she's harmless. But to be

allowed to get out of this country without having the police at your heels, you must tell Parks the whole story, or enough of it to convince him that you are telling the truth.

"Otherwise you are likely to be held here indefinitely, with Beans going about with blood in his eye. You understand?"

"You don't think I would be such a cad as to—"

"Rubbish! You've got your wife and the Gobbler to think about. I said —the Gobbler."

Again he looked questioningly at me, evidently expecting me to make some objection to that.

"That's all right. Margaret and I will look after him. But that other business! Hang it all! I—"

He laughed in the depths of him and came round the table, holding out his hand. As his giant fingers closed about mine he said quietly:

"Thank you. I knew you would help me when the time came. But I see I must force you into that other thing, unless you want to spend your honeymoon in jail. You need not be in the least anxious about me. I am quite capable of—"

A little tap upon the door interrupted him.

"Come!" he called in a low tone, and Randor appeared.

"Mr. Parks to see Miss Van Huysen," he announced in a low monotone, as if he had been advised to do so.

I glanced quickly up into Campbell's face, and saw him nod understandingly.

"Any one with him?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Show him in here."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RIDING OUT.

WITH a sensation that the floor was sliding from under me I listened to the heavy footsteps in the hall, coming nearer and nearer.

Campbell dug his hands into his jacket-pockets.

"Most peculiar thing I ever heard of," he said loudly. "Miss Van Huysen tells me he is extraordinarily like me, and now you say you'd swear in a court of justice that we were the same man. I met the fellow once, I think, but I didn't seem to see the startling—"

"Detective Parks."

Randor's inflectionless voice ushered the detective across the threshold, and a foot within the room Parks halted, looking as if he had come into the wrong place, and was on the verge of apologizing; and when the valet went out, closing the door, the detective started slightly, glanced quickly behind him, then back at Campbell.

Parks's expression suggested that he did not believe it. All the odds in the mental conflict of those first few moments were against him. Campbell had planned the business; Parks was groping in an even greater darkness than I.

"Good morning, Mr. Parks. Miss Van Huysen will be in presently. She has been telling me about last evening, and both she and the earl — Mason, you know—have been remarking how terribly like this Rob Roy chap I am. The earl says he'd swear to it in court, though the first time he saw MacGregor he did not see the resemblance so closely.

"It was rather dark, you know, and last night apparently MacGregor wasn't wearing such hideous clothes — and that seemed to make all the difference. I wish you'd catch this double of mine and let me have a good look at him. How did you ever manage to let him get away like that?"

Parks smiled, and there was a hint of admiration in it; but the cold light in his eyes told that the time for fencing with words had passed.

"I guess he's pretty much like you, Mr. Campbell. Slick, you know—and reckless. It don't always pay to be too reckless, though, because—"

I saw his right hand move.

"That will do! Up with your hands —both of you—quick!"

There was a glint of metal in Campbell's hand, an oath from Parks, and a sudden stop to the movement of his right arm.

"Get them up!"

Mine rose at once. Parks, blazing-eyed and frothy, was a little slower, and in thirty seconds Campbell had reached his side, slapped his pockets, extracted a weapon and a pair of handcuffs, and had backed away, saying pleasantly:

"I can use these. Now, please get over beside the gentleman who claims I am MacGregor. We've had quite an argument about it, and he thinks I ought to be in jail, so I thought I'd wait to see what you thought about it. Thanks—" as Parks moved obediently to my side because he could not help himself. "Stick out your right hand —and you, Didderington, your left."

"Wh-what the deuce—"

"That will do. I am going to give you a chance to tell this gentleman how much like MacGregor I am, and so that he won't get away from you while you're boring him to death with the story, these handcuffs—how the deuce do you open them, Parks? You'd better do it."

And he handed the things to the detective in the most matter-of-fact way, but with a look in his eye and a manner of handling himself and the weapon he held that made resistance resemble suicide.

Parks's lips were tightly compressed, his eyes were like living coals, and his hands trembled perceptibly as he handcuffed himself to me. I was beginning to lose sight of the joke.

"Confound you!" I began a little warmly. "What—"

"As you please," Campbell agreed. "But I should advise you to tell Mr. Parks what you think of me. He will appreciate it so much more. Let's see. That telephone-cord should do very well. And please remember I have two hands and two revolvers very handy, so I think you'd better not be foolish."

He laid the weapon down upon the table, too far away for either of us to reach and within an inch or two of his hand, all the while he acquired enough telephone-cord to rope a horse.

"You may sit down, and Mr. Parks may kneel and listen to the story at your knee. Quite a happy idea. Quick! I haven't much time."

I sat down, utterly dumfounded, and Parks, because he had to, came down with me to his knees. I never took part in anything more systematic or idiotic, and I'll wager the detective, who went red and white in turns, didn't either.

There wasn't a sound in the hall, and though there was plenty of life passing to and fro in the street, we might have had the house to ourselves.

In an instant Campbell had wound the telephone-cord about us, under our armpits; then twisting it in about our arms, so that we could barely move them above the wrists, he finally made us both fast to the chair.

Working like a streak and breathing a little more heavily, he said, when he was almost finished:

"I hope Mr. Parks won't be so ridiculous as to hold the lady of the house responsible for this little entertainment. At present she is in a room not far from here, with the Countess of Didderington and the baby that caused all the trouble, and they haven't the faintest idea of what is going on.

"Didderington brought me in here to tell me how much like MacGregor I was; and I told the butler to show you in, so that the earl might have you all to himself to tell you about it. That's the whole plot."

He stepped back a few paces to review his handiwork.

"Perhaps I'd better gag you—what?"

Parks sputtered like a bad squib; and if the telephone-cord hurt him as much as it did me, I could not blame him. I was becoming irritable enough

to want to tell the story, and felt that a gag would be the last straw.

"No, I won't gag you. Diddering-ton could not tell you what he thinks about me if I did. And a few minutes is all I need. There is your revolver, Mr. Parks."

There came three distinct but very light knocks upon the door.

Campbell smiled and moved toward it noiselessly with a tread so light one wondered how he did it.

"Thank you, gentlemen. You have been very kind. Remember me to the countess, Didderington."

His hand went out to the knob carelessly.

"And the Gobbler."

He pulled the door open just a little and wedged himself into the space.

"Good-by, Mr. Parks."

I can hear the deep bass of that adieu now—can see the laughter in his eyes, and behind that a touch of sadness.

The height and breadth of him, the red of his hair and the tightening lines of his mouth, come back to me—also the tip of a hat-plume behind him.

That was all I saw of Alice Van Huysen.

Then, in a moment, he had slipped from sight, and the door, closing silently, shut them out.

Parks did not move.

I looked down at him, and found him staring at the door as if it fascinated him.

Then, as I wondered why he did not shout or struggle, his head came round slowly and our eyes met.

There was an awkward pause.

"If you holler, I'll knock your block off!" I heard him say, and thought I dreamed it.

Yet I struggled for my own safety to play my part.

"He'll get away if some one doesn't come and—"

The look that came into Parks's eyes halted me. It was a mixture of contempt and pity.

"Get away! Why, you—you—oh, well—what's the use? You don't know any better." As he strove to reach his vest-pocket he continued to growl: "He fooled you every way from the ace, and the minute you thought you were wise to him you took him into a quiet corner of a house this size and told him about it. Huh! And when he's made monkeys of us inside of four walls, you think we've got a chance to catch up with him when he's got the whole world to run about in. You oughta be pulled."

"I'm sorry," I murmured penitently.

"All right. I'll take your word for it," he mumbled, then objected sharply. "Don't move away, you dope! Lean to me. That's better." A little more striving to get at his waistcoat-pocket. "Now we got it!"

His knife was what he was after, and he fumbled with it till he got it open, while I leaned toward him as much as the cord would allow in an effort to slacken it a little.

As he sawed industriously at our bonds his glance went frequently toward the door, as though he were in dread that some one might come in; and when he finally succeeded in cutting us loose, my sigh of relief was no more fervent than his.

The handcuffs were a matter of a moment; and as we both stood up with the pieces of telephone-cord at our feet, Parks looked straight at me—so straight that I felt uncomfortable.

"Going back to England soon?" he asked gruffly.

"Next Wednesday. After the funeral."

He looked relieved; but as he turned to pick up his revolver he stopped, scrutinized me again, and made his point more clear.

"If you open your face about this to a livin' soul, you'll never go back. Understand?"

"I won't say a word," I assured him with more fervor than he dreamed of.

"All right. Where's the way out?"

He snatched up his revolver, then stepped back with a gasp, as if the thing

that was under it might strike. Craning my neck a little, I saw a card—a card with a border of red and black squares, in the center of which was neatly printed—

FOR CHARITY

Parks stared at it a moment or two, while I turned my face away; then, shaking his head as if the matter were beyond him, he picked the card up very carefully, pocketed it, and strode toward the door without a word.

Randor, expressionless as a brick wall, met us in the hall; the sound of women's voices came from the morning-room.

Parks did not even hesitate.

With a "good morning" that was peculiarly subdued, he went out and down the steps, his shoulders drooping a little and his head forward as if in thought. Reporters swarmed round him, but he brushed them aside and marched steadily on—still thinking.

Randor quietly closed the door.

With something akin to pity, I turned toward the morning-room; then, halting, asked the butler in as easy a tone as I could muster:

"Miss Van Huysen has gone?"

Randor's face twitched.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Campbell and she went together."

Peering into the library, he gasped in outraged servitude at the disorder Parks and I had left. He limped by me to gather up the telephone-rope and set things to rights.

I stood momentarily in the hallway, straightening my ruffled clothing and trying to do the same with my disordered thoughts. The women's voices—almost gay, in spite of the tragedy about us—were raised in discussion in the morning-room.

They were talking about the Gobbler. Margaret, I was sure, would worship the little waif.

What about those other waifs—the Gregarach and Alice? Think of Alice—dignified, smart, unemotional Alice Van Huysen—slipping away with the thief! The world would raise its hands in grinning horror. It was laughable—it was tragic.

And now the two principal characters of this tragic farce had left the stage—perhaps never to be seen again; the curtain was about to be rung down; so I went back to the bosom of my "family"—to Margaret and the crowing Gobbler—sure that whatever some of the other players might have before them, my part was ended in this comedy of thieves.

(The End.)

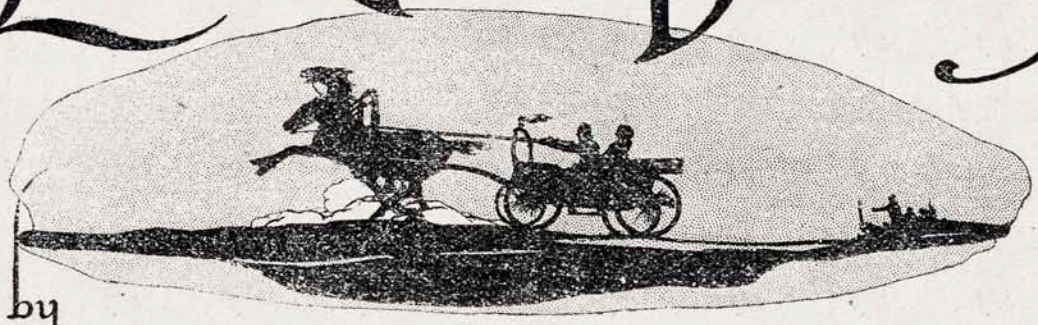
THE BARGAIN.

By Philip Sidney.

MY true love hath my heart, and I have his,
By just exchange one for another given:
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven.
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

His heart in me keeps me and him in one,
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides:
He loves my heart, for once it was his own;
I cherish his because in me it bides:
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

Love Goes Blindly



by De Lysle Ferree Cass

I.

HIS kisses burned her lips and left her breathless, palpitating.

By what little light there was in the shadow of the hedge he could see that she kept her eyes tight closed and could not restrain the convulsive writhing of her mouth.

Her left cheek was splotched with vivid crimson where his unshaven chin had chafed its unnatural pallor. Her fingers remained clenched tensely in his waistcoat, and he was forced to shake her roughly before she roused and relaxed her grip.

"Vera—shy child," he murmured.

That he spoke did not at first penetrate her quivering consciousness. She was too agitated for that. Vaguely she was aware of a vast change in her inner being—a renascence of self, so to speak.

Involuntarily her thoughts slipped back to Tomasz, her betrothed. The memory of him smote her soul with what amounted to a physical shock.

"Why, or why is it that the faculty of wooing thus is reserved for the noble born?" she thought.

Then she turned her eyes back upon the man whose arms still enwrapped her, and he was glad to observe that reason had once more replaced the vacuous ecstasy which his passion had roused.

"Vera," he said again, this time more loudly, "are you calm again?"

The girl fought down the tremulous hysteria that rose within her and pressed his hot cheek with hers.

"Calm?" she sighed, breathing rapidly. "No, not that! I think that I shall never be calm again."

The reassurance the man threw into his laugh sounded hollow out there in the lone stillness of the night.

"But you do love me, Vera? You are not afraid any more?"

She shivered and again closed her eyes. Her words came thick, inarticulate.

"Yes, I am still afraid; but who am I to deny the devotion you offer me? I am only old Yakof's brat—doomed to poverty since the beginning. And you are a boyar—a great nobleman."

"Yes," said he proudly, "I am Nikolai Iaroslaf. Yet I feel that it is no condescension to love you."

The girl went on as if she had not heard him: "You have asked me to go away with you—to leave my father and brothers, the hut which has been my home, to see other horizons than

this—to flee from Tomasz, my betrothed."

"And do you regret that?" queried milord wonderingly. "Am I weighed in the balance with a yokel?"

"No," said she. "No, sir. Only to-morrow was to have been my wedding day, and to-night—to-night you have said much of what we shall be to each other, but nothing of what we shall be to the world."

Nikolai Iaroslaf laughed as he took her closer in his arms.

"An honest girl," quoth he, "as well as a pretty one. My dear, do you doubt but that I mean fairly by you?"

"How can I judge when you have blinded me with love?" cried she. "There was poor Yekaterina, the miller's daughter, who fled with the Count Vladimir. Who knows what has become of her? My brother Sineous says—"

"Pish! Yekaterina was Yekaterina, and you are you. Is this Count Vladimir become a standard on the countryside by which to estimate all other gentlemen?"

"You are angry," whimpered the girl, hiding her face against his chest. "Ah! do not look at me so. I will go away with you."

Far off across the vapor-shrouded tilled lands a dog howled mournfully. The girl shivered and struggled out of the man's embrace.

"To-morrow night — here!" she whispered as if afraid some one might overhear her. "Good-by."

"Wait!" said he.

Once more her senses swum drunkenly as the breath was crushed from her body by the impact of his embrace. She walked unsteadily back toward the hollow where her father's house stood. The man's lips were acrid with the tears that had welled out from beneath her eyelids where he kissed her.

II.

All of the next day relatives kept arriving.

Some came riding bareback on shaggy ponies, some bumping over the rutted roads in springless droshkies, some afoot from the distance of a league or more. Everybody was good-humored and keen for what fun might be got out of the wedding.

Old Yakof, Vera's father, and her brother Sineous waved their hands to each newcomer as they bent to chesty work in the fields.

The men guests, as they arrived, stabled their horses and went out among the furrows to help their hosts. The womenfolk bustled indoors, chattering, to poke sly fun at the bride-to-be, and to do their part in the kitchen, where great preparations for the prenuptial feast were under way.

Vera, her drab mother and three buxom sisters, were there, elbow-deep in the mysteries of flour and pastry. Their faces were flushed from long standing over the ovens. There were kisses and hugging on all sides, and an unceasing babel of conversation.

"Oh, the eager, trembling maiden!" laughed black-eyed Olga, a cousin from a near-by village. "See how demure she is!"

Vera gave the bantering company a troubled smile which conveyed the impression that her mind was astray on other things.

"Do not tease me, please," she said.

"No, don't do that! Let her think of her absent lover," cried Olga shrilly, whereat there was more raillery, in the midst of which Vera's guilty confusion was attributed to the memory of her betrothed. It took the girl some time to chide herself into tranquillity again.

"I am unstrung — I am silly," she kept telling herself. "But I thought for a moment that they knew of Nikolai Iaroslaf, the boyar. I must be calm—calm. I must not let them suspect anything. Oh, if this long day would only come to an end!"

The girl's heart was not in her work. Her mind was twelve hours

forward at the place where her noble lover was to meet her—where she would bid a last farewell to these scenes of her childhood.

Of what the future might hold for her Vera did not permit herself to think. She would not trust herself to do more than recall the breathless rapture of his embrace, of the hot words that made her palpitant even now in reminiscence. He had said that she was to leave drudgery and homespun behind her as things incompatible with his love for her. He had said:

"Those little hands were made to be kissed, not for milking."

All that Tomasz had said of them was: "Your hands are white and strong, Vera. Would you not like to keep the household for me?"

She had answered yes with the family approval, and all of the countryside had congratulated her. Tomasz was a hard worker, sober enough as men went, and thrifty in his ways.

"He will make a good father for your children," the old folks had told the girl, and she assented passively enough.

She was willing then that it should be so. She knew that many a maiden envied her the privilege, and she planned things in a humble way—until Nikolai Iaroslaf came.

Vera met him for the first time at the county fair. He had singled her out from a group of black-eyed maidens doing country dances on the green. He had induced her to step off to one side with him, and he had said:

"Of all the girls here to-day you are prettiest, child. I like you."

Vera's eyes had answered his. It tickled her vanity that so fine a gentleman should have noticed her. So she humored what she mistook for a passing whim, saying to herself:

"I shall never see him again, anyway. Wherein is the harm of a little coquetry?"

To a maiden the harm is never self-evident. When Nikolai Iaroslaf, the boyar, and she kissed down by the brookside that day their sensations were the same, yet far differently interpreted. To the man they implied a specific thing—to the girl they were only vague stirrings of the emotions—a hunger for she knew not what, and which, if she had located it, would have frightened and repelled rather than have allured her.

Even in subsequent meetings when the man had roused passion in her the girl remained neuter in so far as she attached any significance to her feelings. It was not until that last night when his vehemence had torn the veil away from fundamentals that she was made shamefacedly conscious — acknowledged that love implied subjugation.

And now she had promised to go away with him—to see life as a woman sees it from the masculated viewpoint. She dreaded, she was frightened, she was ashamed of the maternal instinct thus awakened. Yet she would go. The love of Nikolai Iaroslaf and the splendid future he offered her made life in a hovel now intolerable.

At sundown all of the men came tramping in from their grimy work in the fields. They were sweaty and smelled—they were uproarious in their greetings.

Ten, fifteen, twenty hairy lips smacked hearty kisses upon the girl's cheek and found her unresponsive. She met each of them dumbly. The time was drawing short now.

By and by Tomasz, her betrothed, arrived. His hair was sleeked down with lambs' grease until it glistened, and he wore his worsted holiday clothes. He was a far bigger man, though younger, than Nikolai Iaroslaf. The tremendous muscles of his chest, arms, and legs showed even through his garments. When he laughed the whole room reverberated from it and the guests smiled, saying:

"Young Tomasz feels jolly to-night. He is thinking of ripe lips and a priest on the morrow."

Vera hung back when everybody else rushed to bid the bridegroom welcome. She was observing him through the eyes of Nikolai Iaroslaf and shivered.

The young man shook hands all around, answering jest with jest. He was in high good humor and kept craning his neck for sight of his sweetheart.

"Vera, where is little Vera?" he cried.

Old Yakof, her father, pushed the white-faced girl toward him through the jostling press of relatives.

"Here she is, son," said he. "Here is the bashful bride!"

Tomasz hugged her unaffectedly before them all, and was surprised when she finally broke away from him. He bent awkwardly and whispered in her ear:

"We have not long now, little one."

"No," answered she, "not long now."

She was thinking of Nikolai Iaroslaf and the trysting hour.

The prenuptial feast was served upon a long oaken trestle, with the guests seated on each side of it. There were not enough chairs to go round, so some of the people sat on boxes and some on logs of firewood, dragged in from the yard. Vera was pulled down upon her betrothed's lap.

"Sit here and I will feed you, rosy one," he told her.

She struggled futilely for a moment under the restraint of his iron arms, and then submitted passively to her position. Everybody made merry with them and indulged in the clumsy innuendos common to middle-class gatherings at such a time.

"Do not mind them, dear," whispered Tomasz. "They mean their jests in good part."

"I did not even hear what they said," replied Vera. "I was thinking of something else."

The food was served in huge wooden platters, from which each diner help himself generously. The loaves of rye bread were torn apart with the fingers, and the great smoking haunches of meat were apportioned by the knives that each man carried at his belt.

There was home-brewed beer for the drinking, and each tankard held nearly a quart. It was but natural that the crowd should get more or less drunk.

Tomasz, holding Vera astride of one mighty knee, fed her the choicest morsels from the platters. He would dip his hand into the ragout and pick out pieces of meat which he would force between her lips and kiss her afterward.

"No more—I cannot eat any more, Tomasz—I am not hungry to-night," she would expostulate from time to time.

Then he would hug her roughly and say:

"You are thinking, little bride—is it not so?" and she would answer:

"Yes, I am thinking, Tomasz."

When even that great quantity of food was all consumed they still drank on. The dinner rapidly assumed the semblance of an orgy. The hour grew late, and Tomasz, with the heat of much malt in his veins, grew more ardent. Vera repulsed him as well as she could.

"Let me go—I am tired," she insisted. "It is time that I was in bed, Tomasz."

"Daughter is right," cried old Yakof, pounding upon the table for silence. "The wedding is to be at nine in the morning, and it will take us a good two hours to get from here to the village where Father Ivan is to await us. So let the bride have her rest and we'll see bright eyes and rosy cheeks on her in the morning."

Tomasz assented reluctantly amid a general clapping of hands. He strained Vera to him in a good-night embrace and gloomed after her figure as it disappeared behind the door of her room. Olga, seated beside him, pulled the swain's ears, laughing.

"Cheer up, doleful one!" exclaimed she. "After to-morrow you will have her always with you."

But Tomasz remained gloomy and silent. Almost it seemed as if he were in the grip of a premonition. He tried to console himself with his already oft-emptied tankard.

Meanwhile Vera was alone at last in her room. She leaned, breathing hard, against the rough pine wall, trying to compose her mind. The strain of that long day's pretense had unnerved her.

Her faculties were benumbed. Her head was heavy—her eyes seemed leaden. Without undressing she threw herself upon the bed and, with a sigh, closed her eyes.

She would rest thus—just for a little while.

It yet lacked three hours of cock-crow—the time she had set for her flight. Nikolai Iaroslaf was to tap thrice, very softly, at her window. His droshky, with two of the fleetest horses on the steppes, were to be awaiting them, hidden in the hollow where he had met her the night before.

All the wedding guests would be sunk deep in slumber in the outhouses —some maybe lying out on the grass. But they would not hear the clatter of hoofs as the bride fled away. They would be too beer-fuddled for that.

Nikolai Iaroslaf would drive fast, with his one skilled hand on the reins and his other clasped round the waist of her whom he was bearing away to better things. He would show her the wonders of Moscow, of St. Petersburg, of foreign lands, perhaps.

He would give her shoes and stockings to wear—hang a rope of pearls around her neck. How nice it would seem to feel soft, warm furs nestling close round one's throat—to do nothing but lie soft in the arms of a great nobleman and hear him say:

"Your little hands were made for kisses, not milking, dear heart!"

To rise late in the morning and—and—and—

The girl's breathing was soft and regular.

She lay there with her red lips parted in a vague smile, with the flush of dreams on her cheeks.

She slept and time slipped away.

III.

VERA did not hear the cocks crow —did not anticipate the first pallid streaks of dawn along the horizon line. It was rather a subtle prescience that the trysting hour was come that startled her suddenly from the depths of troubled slumber.

A nameless dread—a formless premonition weighted her sensibilities.

The house was wrapped in an audible silence. It seemed to the girl as if she were left all alone on earth.

She was conscious that she had overslept the hour. She knew there was need for hurry, yet she could not shake off the inexplicable torpor.

The sky glowed pink through a rent in the old skirt she had hung before her window. It warned her to make speed. The chill of early morning bit through her dress and raised goose-flesh on her bare arms.

She experienced a sinking sensation at the pit of her stomach and shivered, closing her eyes tight and biting her lips until the blood left them, and they remained white as chalk. Was it the frost in the air that made her feel so, or was it the thought of all that then hung in the balance? Vera could not tell.

Rat, tat, tat!—a sudden guarded tattoo upon her window.

The girl stifled the hysterical scream that rose to her lips and caught her breath—waiting.

Rat, tat, tat! Rat, tat, tat!

There it was again, more insistent, less guarded, imperious this time. It was he — Nikolai Iaroslaf. Vera caught a dark shawl from a peg on the wall, cast it round her shoulders, and slipped to her door with a fluttering heart.

She opened the door cautiously, inch by inch, and peered into the outer room.

Stertorous breathing met her ears on every side. The first ghastly rays of morning struggling through the single window lent the scene an added grimness.

The long trestle yet stood with the remains of last night's food and unwashed dishes upon it.

The wedding guests—here a gigantic bearded man, there a disheveled woman—lay sprawled about on the floor, snoring, their mouths open, their clothes still on. The reek of stale beer was nauseating on the air. All were fast asleep.

Cat-footed, the girl stole out among them, lifting her skirts high and stepping over those of the sleepers whom she could not go around.

Once one shaggy peasant almost under her very feet thrashed about with his arms, grumbling in a guttural tone.

Vera stood rigid, sweaty with fear, in the belief that he might awaken. He did not, and, with a gasp, she got safely by him and out through the house door into the yard, where the air was cool and clean.

It had already begun to grow light. The eastern sky was flooded with crimson, and the rim of the sun was rising like a fiery ball out across the flat expanse of the steppes. A bird twittered tentatively on the limb of an adjacent tree and cocked its head at the huddled figure by the door.

Hugging the wall close, the girl turned the corner of the house and scurried across the intervening space between it and the stables. She could hear the ponies champing and stomping in their stalls. The smell of the hay was sweet in her nostrils. She paused there for a momentary glance back at the home she was leaving.

As she turned to go a great shaggy shape stalked out of the black, yawning barn door and blocked her path with bared fangs and hair bristling all along its spine. A menacing growl rooted her to the spot as she recognized Janós, the boarhound of Tomasz, her betrothed.

It was a frightful moment. The beast's eyes gleamed redly wicked at her. A wrong move and he would be at her throat. A single bark and he would awaken those whom she was deserting.

"Janós—down boy!" the girl whispered, casting back the shawl so that the dog might see her face plainly. "Don't you know me, Janós? It is I, Vera, who has fed you so often."

Slowly the pricked ears relaxed and the beast's tail began to wag in friendly fashion. He stalked forward and thrust his cold, moist nose into the girl's trembling palm.

He looked up into her face understandingly as if to say: "Ah, yes! I recognize you now, mistress. You are pretty little Vera, whom Tomasz, my master, loves so. Do not be afraid. I will not hurt you. I will keep you safe for him."

The girl stroked the dog's head with quick, persuasive fingers. She urged him back to the barn door and tried to make him go inside.

"Lie down, Janós — be quiet," she whispered.

Then she tried to slip away, but in a trice he was up and at her heels again. Several times she tried to make him leave her, but always without success. In despair she at last set off at a run. The hound followed close at her heels.

The ground dipped low into a kind of valley in which the wind-blasted grass was dry and ankle-deep. Less than a quarter of a mile away a clump of ancient trees stretched gaunt, gnarled limbs heavenward, as if in protest against their desolate environment.

The fleeing girl kept her eyes fixed fast on them. They were her destination. Hidden in their shelter Nikolai Iaroslaf was waiting with his droshky and fleet horses — waiting impatiently to bear her away to splendid things.

As she neared her goal a horse neighed and a cloaked figure stepped forth to meet her. It was he!

The boyar was booted and wore a little round Astrakhan cap that fitted close to his head and became him well. His clothes were of bright blue broadcloth and the fine linen frill of his shirt-bosom fluttered in the morning breeze.

The girl noticed that he carried a little riding-crop in his hand, but failed to see the angry scowl that vanished as she put out her hands to him.

"You are foolishly late," said he abruptly, making an effort to soften the harshness that crept into his voice. "Come, we must hurry. They may awaken and miss you at any moment now."

Vera leaned, panting, against his shoulder. She was palpitant from the strain of her long run.

"Wait!" she gasped. "I—I am so tired!"

Nikolai Iaroslaf grasped her arm and urged her lagging feet toward where his equipage was to be seen through the trees.

"I cannot afford to wait," he insisted. "Do you want them to come out and catch us? We must hurry, I tell you!"

"One minute—I'm afraid," pleaded the girl, trying to twist loose from the hard pressure of his fingers. "You—you frighten me when you say things to me in that tone, Nikolai."

The nobleman gritted his teeth to withhold the oath that sprang to his lips. He glanced back over his shoulder in the direction of the house.

"Don't be foolish," he snarled. "This is no time for silliness of that kind. You have gone too far to retreat now, my girl."

Not the words, but their intonation struck Vera as ominous. Her heart quailed, and the vague hesitation of the last hour formulated into definite fear. She wrenched her arm violently free of him. Her doubts showed plainly in her eyes.

"I distrust you when you speak like that," she said. "I do not believe that you mean honestly by me. I am minded not to go."

"Are you stark mad?" ejaculated the nobleman, beating his clenched hands together. "You must go with me! That bumpkin, your betrothed, would not take you back now.

"Anyway, why are you afraid of me? Have I not said that I love you? Told about all of the luxuries with which I shall surround you when we get away from this abominable place? Were your protestations of reciprocal passion mere words that died stillborn as soon as uttered here last night? Am I nothing to you, Vera?"

The pupils of the girl's eyes widened perceptibly. Her nostrils fluttered. She began to breathe fast again.

"Yes—you are much to me—you are everything, Nikolai Iaroslaf, but you were so harsh just then. I love you, though dreading I know not what. What proof have I that this feeling of yours for me is not more than a passing fancy?"

For an instant the man hesitated, staring at her. Then suddenly he thrust one hand into the bosom of his coat and drew forth a dull gold necklace to which was attached an old-fashioned locket. He pressed it into her unwilling hands.

"Open the locket," said he. "See! that is a miniature of my mother, the countess. Feodor Vlaseiovitch, master *portraiteur* to his imperial highness, painted it."

Then, before the girl could protest or deter him, the nobleman slipped the chain over her head and shoved the locket down into the bosom of her dress.

"Wear the most precious thing I possess," cried he. "That locket was my mother's deathbed gift to me. It is yours in proof that I love you truly. Now are you convinced, shy heart?"

The girl wavered before the hot appeal in his eyes, and then gave herself impulsively into his arms.

"I believe all you say. I will go with you, Nikolai," she said, unbidden tears welling slowly out from under her drooped eyelids.

The nobleman kissed her hastily and took her up bodily in his arms.

"We must hurry. I will carry you to the droshky," cried he, with the thrill of exultation in his voice.

As he turned to execute his words, Janós, the boarhound, rose up out of the long grass. His throaty snarl halted the man's precipitate steps.

He let Vera slip to her feet on the ground again, and one hand stole into the side-pocket of his coat.

"Back, Janós—home with you!" commanded the girl, stamping her foot and trying to cow the animal, which refused to pay any attention to her."

Keeping her eyes fixed fast on those of the dog, she took reassuring hold of one of her companion's hands and tried to pass on. The dog's dewlaps curled farther back and every coarse hair on his back seemed to stand on end. The ugly rumble of his growl warned them against movement.

In answer Nikolai Iaroslaf leaped suddenly forward and struck at the beast with his heavy riding crop. Janós sprang at his aggressor's throat.

There came the sudden flash and stunning report of a pistol that mingled with a yelp of agony as the hound fell backward.

The echoes of the shot went booming across the silence of the place. The nobleman caught Vera's hand and pulled her after him.

"Run!" he shouted. "We have awakened your friends now. The speed of my horses is our only chance for it!"

Hand in hand they raced to where the thoroughbreds were prancing before the droshky. It was the work of but an instant to loosen their hobbles and make the long whip whine over their heads.

The horses were off with a bound and a tossing of heads. They took to their task like racers. As they dashed out upon the beaten highway, threatening shouts arose behind them.

"Oh!" whispered the girl, white-lipped. "They are after us!" She shrunk closer against her grim-faced companion, whose eyes were fixed straight ahead. "Do you think they can catch us, lover?"

The nobleman's harsh laugh was carried away soundless by the rush of the wind past their ears.

"Let them try to at their peril," he said. "I never have heard of but one peasant who manhandled a boyar of the empire, and the governor crucified him head downward at Utskow last summer."

The road was rutted deep, with the dust of four rainless months thick upon it. The droshky creaked and rocked dangerously from side to side as it was hurtled madly along behind the pounding hoofs of Nikolai Iaroslaf's thoroughbreds.

Coveys of little white birds were scared out of their shelter in the wayside grasses and rose into the air with querulous cries all about the fugitives. As the sun rose higher the dust thickened.

It got into their eyes, mouths, hair, and nostrils; it coated the sleek sides of the horses thickly. When the headlong gallop at which their driver kept them began to tell on the beasts, spume began to edge their bits and to lather the chafing harness. Trickles of sweat ran like shiny threads down along their dust-caked bodies.

Yet the speed did not slacken, nor did Nikolai Iaroslaf pay any heed to the pitiful figure huddled up beside him. Had he, indeed, looked he would have observed that Vera's lips were moving in inarticulate prayer.

Her glances every now and then were cast wildly in the direction whence they fled. She kept asking herself:

"Is all this truly real? Is it not a nightmare? Will I not awaken and find that I have been asleep?"

People were just getting up to go

about their daily tasks in Obtrusk—Cousin Olga's village—when the careening equipage dashed through its single street. The yet sleepy-eyed countrymen ran to right and left in frantic haste to avoid the ruthless hoofs. They stared after the dwindling cloud of yellow dust in the droshky's wake, asking each other:

"By the rood, good man, what was that? Is it some courier riding upon the little father's business?"

One old crone, peering from her window, affirmed this conjecture.

"I saw the Czar's insignia on the driver's cloak," said she.

Ten minutes later they were more truly informed by four fellow-peasants who thundered into their excited midst on blown plow-horses. The riders were helped stiffly down from their saddleless mounts and gulped down two or three jugs of water apiece before they could speak.

Then the eldest of the quartet shook back the tangled mane of hair from before his dirt-rimmed eyes and spread out his arms before the gaping crowd.

"Look at me, people!" he cried. "Do you not recognize me? I am old Yakof, your neighbor—an upright man, known to you all."

"It is true—that is indeed old Yakof!" exclaimed a dozen voices in unison.

Men and women crowded about, mouthing eager questions as to why he rode there in such haste and at such an hour.

"Listen, listen, good friends!" shouted the old man above the babel. "A rascal has carried off my daughter—laughing little Vera—you all know and like her. Did not a droshky pass through here a little while ago? She, my pure bird, was in it. For the love of the saints, give us fresh horses and help us in the pursuit!"

"What is that you say? An abduction? Little Vera, whom Tomasz was to marry? Who is the villain?" and so on—a great chatter, interspersed with righteous curses and adjurations to the saints. In the midst of it all, fresh horses and new recruits to hunt down the unknown ravisher.

Meanwhile the fugitives had gained ground and felt more assured of escape, though Nikolai Iaroslaf did not permit the pace to slacken because of that.

They dashed through several other villages where the smell of cooking food tantalized their nostrils and reminded them of their hitherto disregarded appetites. Yet they dared not pause. The risk was still too great.

By nightfall they came to the edge of the great Svold forest, which all afternoon had lain like an approaching cloud on the horizon before them.

"Safe for a while at least," breathed the nobleman as the tree-boles closed in behind the equipage and the last rays of the sun were blotted out in the mysterious, whispering twilight of the wood.

Vera caught her breath sharply, but made no answering comment. She was too familiar with countryside superstitions to feel at ease in that lowering forest at night-time.

The road was a mere zigzag wagon-track, and the nobleman, perforce, let the horses make their own pace, which was slow. Their sides heaved and their heads hung, with nostrils distended, welcoming the moist coolness round them.

By and by they came upon a little glade where a glimpse of the darkening sky could be had through the leaves and where the sward was sweet-smelling with dew. Of their own accord the horses stopped to crop the grass, and Count Nikolai came out of his black reverie with a start. He turned to his companion.

"We may as well get out here and stretch ourselves while we have the chance," said he, studying the white, drawn face the girl presented.

He helped her out of the droshky stiffly and rubbed her arms and ankles until the numbness in them was succeeded by aches that showed how the blood was circulating freely again. He

held her close up against him and kissed her wan face.

The caresses unnerved the girl.

"I am hungry—oh! so hungry, Nikolai," she whimpered.

"And so am I, dear heart," answered he, "but I have only this. Drink some. It will sustain you until we can get to Utskow in the morning."

She opened her lips obediently as he tilted the flask up against them, and she coughed until the tears stood in her eyes as the vodka scorched her throat. She did not like the taste of it, but the burning warmth that almost immediately swept through her veins was welcome and made her more her old self.

"Let me rest a bit," she sighed, drooping against his shoulder. "Just a little while, lover, and then we shall go on again."

Count Nikolai spread his cloak out on the grass and sat cross-legged with Vera curled up in front of him, her head in his lap and one arm encircling his waist. She heaved a great sigh of weariness.

Away up above stars were beginning to twinkle frostily in the sky. The tree-trunks were gray and ghostly, bearded with moss, and reverberant with the good night chirps of little birds. Somewhere off in the depths of the forest an owl hooted in melancholy fashion.

The girl's lids dropped and she let her body relax.

Presently she slept.

IV.

WHAT it was that finally awakened her she could not tell. Her eyes flashed open with sleep scared out of them; her every sense was keenly alert. She felt as if some terrible thing were skulking just out of arm's reach there in the blackness, ready to pounce down upon her. Yet there was no sound nor sign to confirm her apprehension.

Count Nikolai's chin had dropped to his chest and he also drowsed. The night dew had dampened his hair until it hung down over his forehead, giving him a wild and haggard look. The horses were still browsing a few yards away.

Vera listened intently, her very breath suspended. No sound. The vast silence of the forest seemed palpable almost. The girl had to choke back a hysterical impulse to scream at the top of her lungs.

It was there—there! She knew it was! She could not hear it, nor see it—could not tell what it was—but she was sense-conscious of a lurking menace close to her.

"Nikolai! Nikolai, lover!" she hissed, gripping the sleeping man frantically by the arms. "Awake! I am afraid! There is something here!"

The nobleman was startled into sudden consciousness, and his awakening ejaculation was barely smothered by the girl's hand on his lips. Then caution came to him. His hand slipped into his coat-pocket and emerged again grasping his pistol.

"What is it, Vera?" he whispered uneasily. "What have you seen? What frightened you?"

"I don't know, but it is here—over there—all around us in the shadows of the trees!" she gasped, making a brave effort to retain self-control. "It is nothing that I have actually seen or heard, but I can feel it—seem to sense red eyes staring at us."

Count Nikolai's fingers tightened round the pistol-butt, and his eyes narrowed as he strove in vain to pierce the gloom which surrounded the open place in which they sat. Inch by inch he drew his feet up under him until he could push the girl aside and spring up, with leveled weapon, shouting:

"Come out from behind those trees, you dogs! Stand forth, or I fire!"

The dismal echoes were his only response. Vera had risen, too, with her legs shaking under her.

"I am so afraid, lover," she shuddered, clinging to him. "Let us go away from here quickly. Let us get

in the droshky and hurry out of this dreadful wood!"

Her companion tried to dissemble his uneasiness by a nervous laugh.

"You must be mistaken, child," said he. "There seems to be nothing here."

He turned to unhobble the horses, and as he did so Vera heard the leaves rustle on the other side of the clearing. A pair of burning eyes met her stricken stare, and, almost ere the shriek of warning had escaped her lips, Count Nikolai had seized her around the waist and bounded into the shelter of the trees behind them. Both were breathless and aquiver.

"It was Tomasz—it was Tomasz, with fearful, glaring eyes!" shivered the girl. "They have overtaken us! We are lost!"

Count Nikolai's lips set grimly into a straight line. Holding her by one hand, he dodged away from the dangerous proximity from tree-trunk to tree-trunk. He kept his eyes and pistol directed in the direction whence they fled.

Then came a crackle in the underbrush to their left, and the fugitives changed their course, only to be abruptly halted a few seconds later by similar sounds both before them and on their right hand.

"Trapped!" snarled Count Nikolai, baring his white teeth like a wild animal at bay.

The cordon was closing in round them.

The man and the girl crouched down among the wet foliage and waited. Then all sounds of pursuit ceased and an ominous quiet again reigned.

They hid there ten, fifteen, twenty minutes—hours long it seemed to them—and heard nothing. It was nerve-racking, unbearable! In a frenzy the nobleman leaped to his feet and bellowed for them to come at him—to dare lay a finger-tip on him, a boyar of the empire.

Then they came—nine of them all told, though seeming to be a score or more by reason of the fantasy of those eery surroundings. They came. They stamped, gnashed teeth, spat guttural curses, clenched, clawed.

The count's pistol snapped in their contorted faces, but did not explode. He had forgotten to reload it after shooting Janós the boarhound.

He felt huge, sinewy arms strain terrifically round him until his ribs seemed caving inward.

One peasant, trampled under foot, screamed horribly and sank his teeth into the calf of the battling nobleman's leg.

Old Yakof was pulling out the count's mustache by the roots. With his stubby thumbs some one else tried to gouge out Nikolai Iaroslaf's eyes.

Down went the fighting man, with his snarling aggressors heaped upon him.

The heart-breaking pressure upon his ribs never relaxed.

Foul breath was hot on his face. His jaws hung open as he gasped for breath and tore frantically at the ears, noses, and hair on faces which his blurring eyes could no longer distinguish. Faintly, as if from a great distance, he heard appalling shrieks in a voice that he seemed to know.

He was suffocating. His brain worked slowly but very methodically.

Where had he heard that voice before? It was not that of the Princess Xenia; could it be that of the dashing Mlle. Alix Petrovna, to whom men bowed all along the Nevsky Prospekt? Then there was—

Ah! the little peasant girl with the eyes blue as corn-flowers and the charming smile—the child who so liked to have him—

"Vera," wheezed the prostrate man, and wondered at the murky haze that was aswim before his eyes. "Vera."

V.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Vera, the betrothed, with a rush, the horror and devastation of which was like the sweep of a tidal wave.

She was literally submerged through

the opened flood-gates of her senses, and, spiritually drowning, opened dry, colorless lips to cry out, to scream, shriek, yell hideously.

She was lying there in her bare, little, cheerless room, with the rosin oozing odoriferously through the pine walls and the tattered old skirt hung over the unglazed window.

Everything about her was familiar; nothing was changed except her inner being.

She screeched raucously in mental nausea. In a trice twenty well-known and beloved faces were about her bedside and half a dozen women with arms outstretched to mother her.

"Vera—child, child, what is it?" they cried, and another voice—that of Tomasz—said anxiously:

"Tell us."

The girl pushed them frantically away from her and sat up in bed—eyes staring and vacant, lips parted in a senile way. Her voice was a mere whisper.

"Murderers — murderers—murderers!" she croaked. "You have killed him—killed him!"

A babel of ejaculations broke loose round her. Old Yakof stared perplexedly at his good wife. Red-lipped Olga shrank back with a little cry against Tomasz's stalwart form. The lover seemed to gape his incredulity of the words that grated from his betrothed's lips.

"Why don't you speak?" the girl rasped, gritting strong, white teeth so that all there could hear her. "Why don't you say something—laugh—admit that you did this thing?

"Are you afraid now that you have made away with a boyar? Are you thinking of nooses and the gallows by the crossroads with yourselves strung up there, swinging in the wind like scarecrows?

"You, old Yakof—you who begot me—gouged out his eye with that thumb, and you, Tomasz, stamped him flat with your nail-hobbed boots. Oh, I saw. Murderers! Lying there, still fighting, with blood puddled in the dead leaves. Murderers! Murderers!"

"Vera!" shouted old Yakof commandingly, and upraised both arms like a priest exorcising some poor soul possessed of a devil.

A dozen voices whispered: "Mad. Poor Tomasz!"

The bridegroom dropped to his knees by the bed, appeal on his face. An old woman—she had suckled Vera in infancy—pushed him to one side and put her two arms around the quivering, exhausted figure on the bed.

"Go away, you foolish people," she cried. "Don't all stand there staring like boobies! Can't you see that this is nothing? The poor child has had the nightmare."

"A dream—she is still in the travail of some awful dream," the wedding guests and relatives chorused, and several laughed throatily in their relief. "Why did we not think of that before? But oh, how she startled us!"

Rank contempt curled the girl's lips.

"So you are really cowards as well as murderers," she accused them. "Do not try to fool me so! I dream, indeed! Have I slept for a whole day and a night, then? I ask you that?"

"Slept for a day and a night? What is she talking about?" the ensemble asked each other. The old nurse waved them pettishly back again and addressed herself to the girl with infinite patience.

"You are unstrung, my dear," said she. "You must have eaten something that did not agree with you at the bridal dinner. No day has passed since then. See, child, you still have on the bridal dress, just as you left us to come in here from the table last night.

"You must have thrown yourself on the bed to doze for a minute before undressing, and then this hallucination came to you. Be yourself. This is your wedding morn, and it is time we were on the way to Scurocz, where Father Ivan awaits us with bell, book, and candle.

"Observe the anxiety into which your wild words have thrown Tomasz —good Tomasz, who is to be your husband. Your outcry awoke us from sound sleep."

Vera stared dully down at her limbs and saw indeed the bridal dress, rumpled from her tossing about on the bed. Through the open door she noted that the oaken trestle still bore the remains of the wedding feast. Her senses reeled unsteadily, and she passed shaking hands slowly across her clammy forehead five or six times.

"But, but—" she whispered.

Sense was gradually coming back into her eyes. The old woman soothed her as one would an infant.

Tomasz secured one of her hands and stroked it tenderly.

He kissed it and said:

"I love you, Vera."

Red blood coursed through the girl's veins again, and, pushing aside the watchers, she slid shakily to the floor. A sense of peace embalmed her soul, and she let Tomasz draw her slowly into the strong security of his embrace.

"I am so tired, dear Tomasz," she sighed, "but I am ready to go now to Father Ivan, if you are. I am glad that it was only a dream."

Then everybody clapped their hands.

"This is as it should be!" they cried. "Let us be off! Hurry, good wife; come, brothers! Hey for the bride's candles and old Father Ivan!"

So the wedding procession was formed and, with bright holiday ribbons flaunting, the little company took the road to Scurocz.

Most of the men walked, striding along in time to the music of an unkempt fiddler who pranced in their lead.

Occasionally they would burst into powerful, chesty song—plaintive folk-strains about the goodliness of husbandry or of the lusty sons that come to cheer declining years.

The women of the cortége either rode bareback, astraddle of the shaggy ponies, or sat up very prim and stiff in unaccustomed bodice lacings in the bullock-carts.

Vera sat deep in the straw-bedded bottom of one of these with her mother, her two buxom sisters, and cousin Olga from Obtrusk, while Tomasz walked steadily alongside, his one hand on the edge of the cart and his eyes fixed on those of his betrothed.

When their glances met, rosy blood would suffuse the girl's face and neck and tingle down to her finger-tips. Her heart beat fast and irregularly throughout that long, jolting ride.

All Scurocz turned out to welcome the bridal party with huzzas and the throwing of millet seeds, which is accounted a propitious thing in those parts.

Decrepit Father Ivan met them, watery-eyed and vacuous-faced, in the doorway of the weatherbeaten little church.

As they passed—two by two, each man ahold of his woman's hand—beneath the dingy gilt Greek cross above the doorway, all bobbed their heads and took on a solemn expression of face.

High mass was celebrated, and the formulæ gone through that made one flesh of man and maid, even as the patriarchs had decreed those things centuries ago in the days of the great schism.

The names of Tomasz and of Vera, his wife, were laboriously inscribed upon the parish register, and Father Ivan blessed them with the fervor of one to whom much largess had been promised.

With the drone of the benediction in her ears and the ecstatic grip of her husband's fingers on her hand, Vera's thoughts strayed out over the eddies of candle-smoke on the altar and the bowed heads of her kneeling relatives.

"A dream—they assured me that it was all but a dream," she kept telling herself. "*Ave Maria. Ave Maria.* Yes, yes, it must have been a dream."

The wild music of the fiddler broke out again beyond the doorway; feet shuffled as the assemblage got stiffly on

its feet and made slow progress out of the interior gloom into the shimmer of morning sunlight on the green fields.

Tomasz plucked at Vera's arm half timidly; half with a sense of the new proprietorship that was his. They, too, passed out of the church and stood blinking in the light with their friends.

"My wife!" said Tomasz chokingly, and drew her to him with strong arms that quivered.

Vera gave herself submissively to his will—felt how his lips strained to suffocation upon hers.

A cry suddenly burst from her and she tore herself loose from his hold. One hand she pressed instinctively to her heaving bosom, and the other went to her throat, bare above the open collar of her blouse.

Something felt cold and hard against her warm flesh beneath the pressure of her fingers—something, the chill of which sent a tremor through her.

Her fingers closed round the object and she pulled it forth covertly as far as the gold chain attaching it to her neck would allow.

Her hands held an old-fashioned locket in which reposed a painted miniature.

Dully, as if far away, but still echoing through the caverns of memory, she seemed to hear said:

"Keep it! It is the most precious thing I possess."

Warlord of Mars

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

A Sequel to "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars"

CHAPTER I.

ON THE RIVER ISS.

IN the shadows of the forest that flanks the crimson plain by the side of the Lost Sea of Korus in the Valley Dor, beneath the hurtling moons of Mars, speeding their meteoric way close above the bosom of the dying planet, I crept stealthily along the trail of a shadowy form that hugged the darker places with a consistency that proclaimed the sinister nature of its errand.

For six long Martian months I had haunted the vicinity of the hateful Temple of the Sun, within whose slow-revolving shaft, far beneath the surface of Mars, my princess lay entombed—but whether alive or dead I knew not. Had Phaidor's slim blade found that beloved heart? Time only would reveal the truth.

Six hundred and eighty-seven Martian days must come and go before the cell's door would again come opposite the tunnel's end where last I had seen my ever-beautiful Dejah Thoris.

Half of them had passed, or would on the morrow, yet vivid in my memory, obliterating every event that had come before or after, there remained the last scene before the gust of smoke blinded my eyes and the narrow slit that had given me sight of the interior of her cell closed between me and the Princess of Helium for a long Martian year.

As if it were yesterday, I still saw the beautiful face of Phaidor, daughter of Matai Shang, distorted with jealous rage and hatred as she sprang forward with raised dagger upon the woman I loved.

I saw the red girl, Thuvia of Ptarth, leap forward to prevent the hideous deed.

The smoke from the burning temple had come then to blot out the tragedy, but in my ears rang the single shriek as the knife fell. Then silence, and when the smoke had cleared the revolving temple had shut off all sight or sound from the chamber in which the three beautiful women were imprisoned.

Much there had been to occupy my attention since that terrible moment; but never for an instant had the memory of the thing faded, and all the time that I could spare from the numerous duties that had devolved upon me in the reconstruction of the government of the First Born since our victorious fleet and land forces had overwhelmed them, had been spent close to the grim shaft that held the mother of my boy, Carthoris of Helium.

The race of blacks that for ages had worshiped Issus, the false deity of Mars, had been left in a state of chaos by my revealment of her as naught more than a wicked old woman. In their rage they had torn her to pieces.

From the high pinnacle of their egotism the First Born had been plunged to the depths of humiliation. Their deity was gone, and with her the whole false fabric of their religion. Their vaunted navy had fallen in defeat before the superior ships and fighting men of the red men of Helium.

Fierce green warriors from the ocher sea-bottoms of outer Mars had ridden their wild thoats across the sacred gardens of the Temple of Issus, and Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, fiercest of them all, had sat upon the throne of Issus and ruled the First Born while the allies were deciding the conquered nation's fate.

Almost unanimous was the request that I ascend the ancient throne of the black men, even the First Born themselves concurring in it; but I would have none of it. My heart could never be with the race that had heaped indignities upon my princess and my son.

At my suggestion Xodar became Jeddak of the First Born. He had been a dator, or prince, until Issus had degraded him, so that his fitness for the high office was unquestioned.

The peace of the Valley Dor thus assured, the green warriors dispersed to their desolate sea-bottoms, while we of Helium returned to our own country. Here again was a throne offered me, since no word had been received from the missing Jeddak of Helium, Tardos Mors, grandfather of Dejah Thoris, or his son, Mors Kajak, Jed of Helium, her father.

Over a year had elapsed since they had set out to explore the northern hemisphere in search of Carthoris, and at last their disheartened people had accepted as truth the vague rumors of their death that had filtered in from the frozen region of the pole.

Once again I refused a throne, for I would not believe that the mighty Tardos Mors or his no less redoubtable son was dead.

"Let one of their own blood rule you until they return," I said to the assembled nobles of Helium, as I addressed them from the pedestal of truth beside the throne of righteousness in the Temple of Reward, from the very spot where I had stood a year before when Zat Arras pronounced the sentence of death upon me.

As I spoke I stepped forward and laid my hand upon the shoulder of Carthoris where he stood in the front rank of the circle of nobles about me.

As one, the nobles and the people lifted their voices in a long cheer of approbation. Ten thousand swords sprang on high from as many scabbards, and the glorious fighting men of ancient Helium hailed Carthoris Jeddak of Helium.

His tenure of office was to be for life or until his great-grandfather, or grandfather, should return. Having thus satisfactorily arranged this important duty for Helium, I started the following day for the Valley Dor that I might remain close to the Temple of the Sun until the fateful day that should see the opening of the prison-cell where my lost love lay buried.

Hor Vastus and Kantos Kan, with my other noble lieutenants, I left with Carthoris at Helium, that he might have the benefit of their wisdom, bravery, and loyalty in the performance of the arduous duties which had devolved upon him. Only Woola, my Martian hound, accompanied me.

At my heels to-night the faithful beast moved softly in my tracks. As large as a Shetland pony, with hideous head and frightful fangs, he was indeed an awesome spectacle as he crept after me on his ten short, muscular legs; but to me he was the embodiment of love and royalty.

The figure ahead was that of the black dator of the First Born, Thurid, whose undying enmity I had earned that time I laid him low with my bare hands in the courtyard of the Temple of Issus, and bound him with his own harness before the noble men and women who had but a moment before been extolling his prowess.

Like many of his fellows, he had apparently accepted the new order of things with good grace, and had sworn fealty to Xodar, his new ruler; but I knew that he hated me, and I was sure that in his heart he envied and hated Xodar, so I had kept a watch upon his comings and goings, to the end that I had become convinced that he was occupied with some manner of intrigue.

Several times I had observed him leaving the walled city of the First Born after dark, taking his way out into the cruel and horrible Valley Dor, where no honest business could lead any man.

To-night he moved quickly along the edge of the forest until well beyond sight or sound of the city, then he turned across the crimson sward toward the shore of the Lost Sea of Korus.

The rays of the nearer moon, swinging low across the valley, touched his jewel-incrusted harness with a thousand changing lights and glanced from the glossy ebony of his smooth hide. Twice he turned his head back toward the forest, after the manner of one who is upon an evil errand, though he must have felt quite safe from pursuit.

I did not dare follow him there beneath the moonlight, since it best suited my plans not to interrupt his — I wished him to reach his destination unsuspecting, that I might learn just where that destination lay and the business that awaited the night prowler there.

So it was that I remained hidden until after Thurid had disappeared over the edge of the steep bank beside the sea a quarter of a mile away. Then, with Woola following, I hastened across the open after the black dator.

The quiet of the tomb lay upon the mysterious valley of death, crouching deep in its warm nest within the sunken area at the south pole of the dying planet. In the far distance the Golden Cliffs raised their mighty barrier faces far into the starlit heavens, the precious metals and scintillating jewels that composed them sparkling in the brilliant light of Mars's two gorgeous moons.

At my back was the mighty forest, pruned and trimmed like the sward to parklike symmetry by the browsing of the ghoulish plant men.

Before me lay the Lost Sea of Korus, while farther on I caught the shimmering ribbon of Iss, the River of Mystery, where it wound out from beneath the Golden Cliffs to empty into the Lost Sea of Korus, to which for countless ages had been borne the deluded and unhappy Martians of the outer world upon the voluntary pilgrimage to this false heaven.

The plant men, with their blood-sucking hands, and the monstrous white apes that make Dor hideous by day, were hidden in their lairs for the night.

There was no longer a Holy Thern upon the balcony in the Golden Cliffs above the Iss to summon them with weird cry to the victims floating down to their maws upon the cold, broad bosom of ancient Iss.

The navies of Helium and the First Born had cleared the fortresses and the temples of the therns when they had refused to surrender and accept the new order of things that had swept their false religion from long-suffering Mars.

In a few isolated countries they still retained their age-old power; but Matai Shang, their hekkador, Father of Therns, had been driven from his temple. Strenuous had been our endeavors to capture him; but with a few of the faithful he had escaped, and was in hiding — where we knew not.

As I came cautiously to the edge of the low cliff overlooking the Lost Sea of Korus I saw Thurid pushing out upon the bosom of the shimmering water in a small skiff—one of those strangely wrought craft of unthinkable age which the Holy Therns, with their organization of priests and lesser therns, were wont to distribute along the banks of the Iss, that the long journey of their victims might be facilitated.

Drawn up upon the beach below me were a score of similar boats, each with its long pole, at one end of which was a pike, at the other a paddle. Thurid was hugging the shore, and as he passed out of sight round a near-by promontory I shoved one of the boats into the water and, calling Woola into it, pushed out from shore.

The pursuit of Thurid carried me along the edge of the sea toward the mouth of the Iss. The farther moon lay close to the horizon, casting a dense shadow beneath the cliffs that fringed the water. Thuria, the nearer moon, had set, nor would it rise again for near four hours, so that I was insured concealing darkness for that length of time at least.

On and on went the black warrior. Now he was opposite the mouth of the Iss. Without an instant's hesitation he turned up the grim river, paddling hard again the strong current.

After him came Woola and I, closer now, for the man was too intent upon forcing his craft up the river to have any eyes for what might be transpiring behind him. He hugged the shore, out of the main channel, where the current was less strong.

Presently he came to the dark, cavernous portal in the face of the Golden Cliffs, through which the river poured. On into the Stygian darkness beyond he urged his craft.

It seemed hopeless to attempt to follow him here where I could not see my hand before my face, and I was almost on the point of giving up the pursuit and drifting back to the mouth of the river, there to await his return, when a sudden bend showed a faint luminosity ahead.

My quarry was plainly visible again, and in the increasing light from the phosphorescent rock that lay embedded in great patches in the roughly arched roof of the cavern I had no difficulty in following him.

It was my first trip upon the bosom of Iss, and the things I saw there will live forever in my memory.

Terrible as they were, they could not have commenced to approximate the horrible conditions which must have obtained before Tars Tarkas, the

great green warrior; Xodar, the black dator, and I brought the light of truth to the outer world and stopped the mad rush of millions upon the voluntary pilgrimage to what they believed would end in a beautiful valley of peace and happiness and love.

Even now the low islands which dotted the broad stream were choked with the skeletons of those who, through fear or a sudden awakening to the truth, had halted almost at the completion of their journey.

In the awful stench of these frightful charnel isles haggard maniacs screamed and gibbered and fought among the torn remnants of their grisly feasts; while on those which contained but clean-picked bones they battled with one another, the weaker furnishing sustenance for the stronger; or with clawlike hands clutched at the bodies that drifted down with the current.

Thurid paid not the slightest attention to the screaming things that either menaced or pleaded with him as the mood directed them—evidently he was familiar with the horrid sights that surrounded him. He continued up the river for perhaps a mile; and then, crossing over to the left bank, drew his craft up on a low ledge that lay almost on a level with the water.

I dared not follow across the stream, for he most surely would have seen me. Instead I stopped close to the opposite wall beneath an overhanging mass of rock that cast a dense shadow beneath it. Here I could watch Thurid without danger of discovery.

The black was standing upon the ledge beside his boat, looking up the river, as though he were awaiting one whom he expected from that direction.

As I lay there beneath the dark rocks I noticed that a strong current seemed to flow directly toward the center of the river, so that it was difficult to hold my craft in its position. I edged farther into the shadow that I might find a hold upon the bank; but, though I proceeded several yards, I touched nothing; and then, finding that I would soon reach a point from where I could no longer see the black man, I was compelled to remain where I was, holding my position as best I could by paddling strongly against the current which flowed from beneath the rocky mass behind me.

I could not imagine what might cause this strong lateral flow, for the main channel of the river was plainly visible to me from where I sat, and I could see the rippling junction of it and the mysterious current which had aroused my curiosity.

While I was still speculating upon the phenomenon my attention was suddenly riveted upon Thurid, who had raised both palms forward above his head in the universal salute of Martians, and a moment later his "Kaor!" the Barsoomian word of greeting, came in low but distinct tones.

I turned my eyes up the river in the direction that his were bent, and presently there came within my limited range of vision a long boat, in which were six men. Five were at the paddles, while the sixth sat in the seat of honor at the bow.

The white skins, the flowing yellow wigs which covered their bald pates, and the gorgeous diadems set in circlets of gold about their heads marked them as Holy Therns.

As they drew up beside the ledge upon which Thurid awaited them, he in the bow of the boat arose to step ashore, and then I saw that it was none other than Matai Shang, Father of Therns.

The evident cordiality with which the two men exchanged greetings filled me with wonder, for the black and white men of Barsoom were hereditary enemies—not ever before had I known of two meeting other than in battle.

Evidently the reverses that had recently overtaken both peoples had resulted in an alliance between these two individuals—at least against the com-

mon enemy — and now I saw why Thurid had come so often out into the Valley Dor by night, and that the nature of his conspiring might be such as to strike close to me or my friends.

I wished that I might have found a point closer to the two men from which to have heard their conversation; but it was out of the question now to attempt to cross the river, and so I lay quietly watching them, who would have given so much to have known how close I lay to them, and how easily they might have overcome and killed me with their superior force.

Several times Thurid pointed across the river in my direction, but that his gestures had any reference to me I did not for a moment believe. Presently he and Matai Shang entered the latter's boat, which turned out into the river and, swinging round, forged steadily across in my direction.

As they advanced I moved my boat farther and farther in beneath the overhanging wall, but at last it became evident that their craft was holding the same course. The five paddlers sent the larger boat ahead at a speed that taxed my energies to equal.

Every instant I expected to feel my prow crash against solid rock. The light from the river was no longer visible, but ahead I saw the faint tinge of a distant radiance, and still the water before me was open.

At last the truth dawned upon me— I was following a subterranean river which emptied into the Iss at the very point where I had hidden.

The rowers were now quite close to me. The noise of their own paddles drowned the sound of mine, but in another instant the growing light ahead would reveal me to them.

There was no time to be lost. Whatever action I was to take must be taken at once. Swinging the prow of my boat toward the right, I sought the river's rocky side, and there I lay while Matai Shang and Thurid approached up the center of the stream, which was much narrower than the Iss.

As they came nearer I heard the voices of Thurid and the Father of Therns raised in argument.

"I tell you, thern," the black dator was saying, "that I wish only vengeance upon John Carter, Prince of Helium. I am leading you into no trap. What could I gain by betraying you to those who have ruined my nation and my house?"

"Let us stop here a moment that I may hear your plans," replied the hekkador, "and then we may proceed with a better understanding of our duties and obligations."

To the rowers he issued the command that brought their boat in toward the bank not a dozen paces beyond the spot where I lay.

Had they pulled in below me they must surely have seen me against the faint glow of light ahead, but from where they finally came to rest I was as secure from detection as though miles separated us.

The few words I had already overheard whetted my curiosity, and I was anxious to learn what manner of vengeance Thurid was planning against me. Nor had I long to wait. I listened intently.

"There are no obligations, Father of Therns," continued the First Born. "Thurid, Dator of Issus, has no price. When the thing has been accomplished I shall be glad if you will see to it that I am well received, as is befitting my ancient lineage and noble rank, at some court that is yet loyal to thy ancient faith, for I cannot return to the Valley Dor or elsewhere within the power of the Prince of Helium; but even that I do not demand—it shall be as your own desire in the matter directs."

"It shall be as you wish, dator," replied Matai Shang; "nor is that all— power and riches shall be yours if you restore my daughter, Phaidor, to me, and place within my power Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium.

"Ah," he continued with a malicious snarl; "but the earth-man shall suffer for the indignities he has put

upon the holy of holies, nor shall any vileness be too vile to inflict upon his princess. Would that it were in my power to force him to witness the humiliation and degradation of the red woman."

"You shall have your way with her before another day has passed, Matai Shang," said Thurid, "if you but say the word."

"I have heard of the Temple of the Sun, dator," replied Matai Shang, "but never have I heard that its prisoners could be released before the allotted year of their incarceration had elapsed. How, then, may you accomplish the impossible?"

"Access may be had to any cell of the temple at any time," replied Thurid. "Only Issus knew this; nor was it ever Issus's way to divulge more of her secrets than were necessary. By chance, after her death, I came upon an ancient plan of the temple, and there I found, plainly writ, the most minute directions for reaching the cells at any time.

"And more I learned — that many men had gone thither for Issus in the past, always on errands of death and torture to the prisoners; but those who thus learned the secret way were wont to die mysteriously immediately they had returned and made their reports to Issus."

"Let us proceed, then," said Matai Shang at last. "I must trust you, yet at the same time you must trust me, for we are six to your one."

"I do not fear," replied Thurid, "nor need you. Our hatred of the common enemy is sufficient bond to insure our loyalty to one another, and after we have defiled the Princess of Helium there will be still greater reason for the maintenance of our allegiance — unless I greatly mistake the temper of her lord."

Matai Shang spoke to the paddlers. The boat moved on up the tributary.

It was with difficulty that I restrained myself from rushing upon them and slaying the two vile plotters; but quickly I saw the mad rashness of such an act, which would cut down the only man who could lead the way to Dejah Thoris's prison before the long Martian year had swung its interminable circle.

If he should lead Matai Shang to that hallowed spot, then, too, should he lead John Carter, Prince of Helium.

With silent paddle I swung slowly into the wake of the larger craft.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE MOUNTAINS.

As we advanced up the river which winds beneath the Golden Cliffs out of the bowels of the Mountains of Otz to mingle its dark waters with the grim and mysterious Iss the faint glow which had appeared before us grew gradually into an all-enveloping radiance.

The river widened until it presented the aspect of a large lake whose vaulted dome, lighted by glowing phosphorescent rock, was splashed with the vivid rays of the diamond, the sapphire, the ruby, and the countless, nameless jewels of Barsoom which lay incrusted in the virgin gold which forms the major portion of these magnificent cliffs.

Beyond the lighted chamber of the lake was darkness — what lay behind the darkness I could not even guess.

To have followed the thern-boat across the gleaming water would have been to invite instant detection, and so, though I was loath to permit Thurid to pass even for an instant beyond my sight, I was forced to wait in the shadows until the other boat had passed from my sight at the far extremity of the lake. Then I paddled out upon the brilliant surface in the direction they had taken.

When, after what seemed an eternity, I reached the shadows at the upper end of the lake I found that the river issued from a low aperture, to pass beneath which it was necessary

that I compel Woola to lie flat in the boat, and I, myself, must need bend double before the low roof cleared my head.

Immediately the roof rose again upon the other side, but no longer was the way brilliantly lighted. Instead only a feeble glow emanated from small and scattered patches of phosphorescent rock in wall and roof.

Directly before me the river ran into this smaller chamber through three separate arched openings.

Thurid and the therns were nowhere to be seen—into which of the dark holes had they disappeared? There was no means by which I might know, and so I chose the center opening as being as likely to lead me in the right direction as another.

Here the way was through utter darkness. The stream was narrow—so narrow that in the blackness I was constantly bumping first one rocky wall and then another as the river wound hither and thither along its flinty bed.

Far ahead I presently heard a deep and sullen roar which increased in volume as I advanced, and then broke upon my ears with all the intensity of its mad fury as I swung round a sharp curve into a dimly lighted stretch of water.

Directly before me the river thundered down from above in a mighty waterfall that filled the narrow gorge from side to side, rising far above me several hundred feet — as magnificent a spectacle as I had ever seen.

But the roar—the awful, deafening roar of those tumbling waters penned in the rocky, subterranean vault! Had the fall not entirely blocked my further passage and shown me that I had followed the wrong course I believe that I should have fled any way before the maddening tumult.

Thurid and the therns could not have come this way. By stumbling upon the wrong course I had lost the trail, and they had gained so much ahead of me that now I might not be able to find them before it was too late, if, in fact, I could find them at all.

It had taken several hours to force my way up to the falls against the strong current, and other hours would be required for the descent, although the pace would be much swifter.

With a sigh I turned the prow of my craft down-stream, and with mighty strokes hastened with reckless speed through the dark and tortuous channel until once again I came to the chamber into which flowed the three branches of the river.

Two unexplored channels still remained from which to choose; nor was there any means by which I could judge which was the more likely to lead me to the plotters.

Never in my life, that I can recall, have I suffered such an agony of indecision. So much depended upon a correct choice. So much depended upon haste.

The hours that I had already lost might seal the fate of the incomparable Dejah Thoris were she not already dead—to sacrifice other hours, and maybe days in a fruitless exploration of another blind lead would unquestionably prove fatal.

Several times I essayed the right-hand entrance only to turn back as though warned by some strange intuitive sense that this was not the way. At last, convinced by the oft-recurring phenomenon, I cast my all upon the left-hand archway; yet it was with a lingering doubt that I turned a parting look at the sullen waters which rolled, dark and forbidding, from beneath the low archway on the right.

And as I looked there came bobbing out upon the current from the Stygian darkness of the interior the shell of one of the great, succulent fruits of the sorapus-tree.

I could scarce restrain a shout of elation as this silent, insensate messenger floated past me, on toward the Iss and Korus, for it told me that journeying Martians were above me on that very stream.

They had eaten of this marvelous fruit which nature concentrates within the hard shell of the sorapus nut, and having eaten had cast the husk overboard. It could have come from no others than the party I sought.

Quickly I abandoned all thought of the left-hand passage, and a moment later had turned into the right. The stream soon widened, and recurring areas of phosphorescent rock lighted my way.

I made good time, but was convinced that I was nearly a day behind those I was tracking. Neither Woola nor I had eaten since the previous day, but in so far as he was concerned it mattered but little, since practically all the animals of the dead sea bottoms of Mars are able to go for incredible periods without either food or water.

Nor did I suffer. The water of the river was sweet and cold, for it was unpolluted by decaying bodies—unlike the Iss—and as for food, why the mere thought that I was nearing my beloved princess raised me above every material want.

As I proceeded the river became narrower and the current swift and turbulent—so swift in fact that it was with difficulty that I forced my craft upward at all. I could not have been making to exceed a hundred yards an hour when, at a bend, I was confronted by a series of rapids through which the river foamed and boiled at a terrific rate.

My heart sank within me. The sorapus-nut shell had proved a false prophet, and, after all, my intuition had been correct—it was the left-hand channel that I should have followed.

Had I been a woman I should have wept. At my right was a great, slow-moving eddy that circled far beneath the cliff's overhanging side, and to rest my tired muscles before turning back I let my boat drift into its embrace.

I was almost prostrated by disappointment. It would mean another half-day's loss of time to retrace my way and take the only passage that yet remained unexplored. What fate had led me to select from three possible avenues the two that were wrong?

As the lazy current of the eddy carried me slowly about the periphery of the watery circle my boat twice touched the rocky side of the river in the dark recess beneath the cliff. At third time it struck, gently as it had before, but the contact resulted in a different sound — the sound of wood scraping upon wood.

In an instant I was on the alert, for there could be no wood within that buried river that had not been man brought. Almost coincidently with my first apprehension of the noise my hand shot out across the boat's side, and a second later I felt my fingers gripping the gunwale of another craft.

As though turned to stone I sat in tense and rigid silence, straining my eyes into the utter darkness before me in an effort to discover if the boat were occupied.

It was entirely possible that there might be men on board it who were still ignorant of my presence, for the boat was scraping gently against the rocks upon one side, so that the gentle touch of my boat upon the other easily could have gone unnoticed.

Peer as I would I could not penetrate the darkness, and then I listened intently for the sound of breathing near me; but except for the noise of the rapids, the soft scraping of the boats, and the lapping of the water at their sides I could distinguish no sound.

A rope lay coiled in the bottom of my own craft. Very softly I gathered it up, and making one end fast to the bronze ring in the prow I stepped gingerly into the boat beside me. In one hand I grasped the rope, in the other my keen long-sword.

For a full minute, perhaps, I stood motionless after entering the strange craft. It had rocked a trifle beneath my weight, but it had been the scraping of its side against the side of my

own boat that had seemed most likely to alarm its occupants, if there were any.

But there was no answering sound, and a moment later I had felt from stem to stern and found the boat deserted.

Groping with my hands along the face of the rocks to which the craft was moored, I discovered a narrow ledge which I knew must be the avenue taken by those who had come before me. That they could be none other than Thurid and his party I was convinced by the size and build of the boat I had found.

Calling to Woola to follow me I stepped out upon the ledge. The great, savage brute, agile as a cat, crept after me.

As he passed through the boat that had been occupied by Thurid and the therns he emitted a single low growl, and when he came beside me upon the ledge and my hand rested upon his neck I felt his short mane bristling with anger. I think he sensed telepathically the recent presence of an enemy, for I had made no effort to impart to him the nature of our quest or the status of those we tracked.

This omission I now made haste to correct, and, after the manner of green Martians with their beasts, I let him know partially by the weird and uncanny telepathy of Barsoom and partly by word of mouth that we were upon the trail of those who had recently occupied the boat through which we had just passed.

A soft purr, like that of a great cat, indicated that Woola understood, and then, with a word to him to follow, I turned to the right along the ledge, but scarcely had I done so than I felt his mighty fangs tugging at my leathern harness.

As I turned to discover the cause of his act he continued to pull me steadily in the opposite direction, nor would he desist until I had turned about and indicated that I would follow him voluntarily.

Never had I known him to be in error in a matter of tracking, so it was with a feeling of entire security that I moved cautiously in the huge beast's wake. Through Cimmerian darkness he moved along the narrow ledge beside the boiling rapids.

As we advanced the way led from beneath the overhanging cliffs out into a dim light, and then it was that I saw that the trail had been cut from the living rock, and that it ran up along the river's side beyond the rapids.

For hours we followed the dark and gloomy river further and further into the bowels of Mars. From the direction and distance I knew that we must be well beneath the Valley Dor, and possibly beneath the Sea of Omean as well — it could not be much further now to the Temple of the Sun.

Even as my mind framed the thought Woola halted suddenly before a narrow, arched doorway in the cliff by the trail's side. Quickly he crouched back away from the entrance, at the same time turning his eyes toward me.

Words could not have more plainly told me that danger of some sort lay near by, and so I pressed quietly forward to his side, and passing him looked into the aperture at our right.

Before me was a fair-sized chamber that, from its appointments, I knew must have at one time been a guard-room. There were racks for weapons, and slightly raised platforms for the sleeping silks and furs of the warriors, but now its only occupants were two of the therns who had been of the party with Thurid and Matai Shang.

The men were in earnest conversation, and from their tones it was apparent that they were entirely unaware that they had listeners.

"I tell you," one of them was saying, "I do not trust the black one. There was no necessity for leaving us here to guard the way. Against what, pray, should we guard this long-forgotten, abysmal path? It was but a ruse to divide our numbers.

"He will have Matai Shang leave

others elsewhere on some pretext or another, and then at last he will fall upon us with his confederates and slay us all."

"I believe you, Lakor," replied the other, "there can never be aught else than deadly hatred between thern and First Born. And what think you of the ridiculous matter of the light? 'Let the light shine with the intensity of three radium units for fifty tals, and for one zat let it shine with the intensity of one radium unit, and then for twenty-five tals with nine units.' Those were his very words, and to think that wise old Matai Shang should listen to such foolishness."

"Indeed, it is silly," replied Lakor. "It will open nothing other than the way to a quick death for us all. He had to make some answer when Matai Shang asked him flatly what he should do when he came to the Temple of the Sun, and so he made his answer quickly from his imagination — I would wager a hekkador's diadem that he could not now repeat it himself."

"Let us not remain here longer, Lakor," spoke the other thern. "Perchance if we hasten after them we may come in time to rescue Matai Shang, and wreak our own vengeance upon the black dator. What say you?"

"Never in a long life," answered Lakor, "have I disobeyed a single command of the Father of Therns. I shall stay here until I rot if he does not return to bid me elsewhere."

Lakor's companion shook his head.

"You are my superior," he said; "I cannot do other than you sanction, though I still believe that we are foolish to remain."

I, too, thought that they were foolish to remain, for I saw from Woola's actions that the trail led through the room where the two therns held guard. I had no reason to harbor any considerable love for this race of self-deified demons, yet I would have passed them by were it possible without molesting them.

It was worth trying anyway, for a fight might delay us considerably, or even put an end entirely to my search—better men than I have gone down before fighters of meaner ability than that possessed by the thern warriors.

Signaling Woola to heel I stepped suddenly into the room before the two men. At sight of me their long-swords flashed from the harness at their sides, but I raised my hand in a gesture of restraint.

"I seek Thurid, the black dator," I said. "My quarrel is with him, not with you. Let me pass then in peace, for if I mistake not he is as much your enemy as mine, and you can have no cause to protect him."

They lowered their swords and Lakor spoke.

"I know not whom you may be, with the white skin of a thern and the black hair of a red man; but were it only Thurid whose safety were at stake you might pass, and welcome, in so far as we be concerned.

"Tell us who you be, and what mission calls you to this unknown world beneath the Valley Dor, then maybe we can see our way to let you pass upon the errand which we should like to undertake would our orders permit."

I was surprised that neither of them had recognized me, for I thought that I was quite sufficiently well known either by personal experience or reputation to every thern upon Barsoom as to make my identity immediately apparent in any part of the planet. In fact, I was the only white man upon Mars whose hair was black and whose eyes were gray, with the exception of my son, Carthoris.

To reveal my identity might be to precipitate an attack, for every thern upon Barsoom knew that to me they owed the fall of their age-old spiritual supremacy. On the other hand my reputation as a fighting man might be sufficient to pass me by these two were their livers not of the right complexion to welcome a battle to the death.

To be quite candid I did not attempt

to delude myself with any such sophistry, since I knew well that upon warlike Mars there are few cowards, and that every man, whether prince, priest or peasant, glories in deadly strife. And so I gripped my long-sword the tighter as I replied to Lakor.

"I believe that you will see the wisdom of permitting me to pass unmolested," I said, "for it would avail you nothing to die uselessly in the rocky bowels of Barsoom merely to protect a hereditary enemy, such as Thurid, Dator of the First Born.

"That you shall die should you elect to oppose me is evidenced by the moldering corpses of all the many great Barsoomian warriors who have gone down beneath this blade—I am John Carter, Prince of Helium."

For a moment that name seemed to paralyze the two men; but only for a moment, and then the younger of them, with a vile name upon his lips, rushed toward me with ready sword.

He had been standing a little behind his companion, Lakor, during our parley, and now, ere he could engage me, the older man grasped his harness and drew him back.

"Hold on!" commanded Lakor. "There will be plenty of time to fight if we find it wise to fight at all. There be good reasons why every thern upon Barsoom should yearn to spill the blood of the blasphemer, the sacrilegist; but let us mix wisdom with our righteous hate. The Prince of Helium is bound upon an errand which we ourselves, but a moment since, were wishing that we might undertake.

"Let him go then and slay the black. When he returns we shall still be here to bar his way to the outer world, and thus we shall have rid ourselves of two enemies, nor have incurred the displeasure of the Father of Therns."

As he spoke I could not but note the crafty glint in his evil eyes, and while I saw the apparent logic of his reasoning I felt, subconsciously perhaps, that his words did but veil some sinister intent. The other thern turned toward him in evident surprise, but when Lakor had whispered a few brief words into his ear he, too, drew back and nodded acquiescence to his superior's suggestion.

"Proceed, John Carter," said Lakor; "but know that if Thurid does not lay you low there will be those awaiting your return who will see that you never pass again into the sunlight of the upper world. Go!"

During our conversation Woola had been growling and bristling close to my side. Occasionally he would look up into my face with a low, pleading whine, as though begging for the word that would send him headlong at the bare throats before him. He, too, sensed the villainy behind the smooth words.

Beyond the therns several doorways opened off the guard-room, and toward the one upon the extreme right Lakor motioned.

"That way leads to Thurid," he said.

But when I would have called Woola to follow me there the beast whined and held back, and at last ran quickly to the first opening at the left, where he stood emitting his coughing bark, as though urging me to follow him upon the right way.

I turned a questioning look upon Lakor.

"The brute is seldom wrong," I said, "and while I do not doubt your superior knowledge, thern, I think that I shall do well to listen to the voice of instinct that is backed by love and loyalty."

As I spoke I smiled grimly that he might know without words that I distrusted him.

"As you will," the fellow replied with a shrug. "In the end it shall be all the same."

I turned and followed Woola into the left-hand passage, and though my back was toward my enemies, my ears were on the alert; yet I heard no sound of pursuit. The passageway was dimly lighted by occasional radium bulbs

the universal lighting medium of Barsoom.

These same lamps may have been doing continuous duty in these subterranean chambers for ages, since they require no attention and are so compounded that they give off but the minutest portion of their substance in the generation of years of luminosity.

We had proceeded for but a short distance when we commenced to pass the mouths of diverging corridors, but not once did Woola hesitate. It was at the opening to one of these corridors upon my right that I presently heard a sound that spoke more plainly to John Carter, fighting man, than could the words of my mother tongue —it was the clank of metal—the metal of a warrior's harness — and it came from a little distance up the corridor upon my right.

Woola heard it, too, and like a flash he had wheeled and stood facing the threatened danger, his mane all abristle and all his rows of glistening fangs bared by snarling, backdrawn lips. With a gesture I silenced him, and together we drew aside into another corridor a few paces farther on.

Here we waited; nor did we have long to wait, for presently we saw the shadows of two men fall upon the floor of the main corridor athwart the doorway of our hiding-place. Very cautiously they were moving now—the accidental clank that had alarmed me was not repeated.

Presently they came opposite our station; nor was I surprised to see that the two were Lakor and his companion of the guard-room.

They walked very softly, and in the right hand of each gleamed a keen long-sword. They halted quite close to the entrance to our retreat, whispering to one another.

"Can it be that we have distanced them already?" said Lakor.

"Either that or the beast has led the man upon a wrong trail," replied the other, "for the way which we took is by far the shorter to this point—for him who knows it. John Carter would have found it a short road to death had he taken it as you suggested to him."

"Yes," said Lakor; "no amount of fighting ability would have saved him from the pivoted flagstone. He surely would have stepped upon it, and by now, if the pit beneath it has a bottom, which Thurid denies, he should have been rapidly approaching it. Curses on that calot of his that warned him toward the safer avenue!"

"There be other dangers ahead of him, though," spoke Lakor's fellow, "which he may not so easily escape—should he succeed in escaping our two good swords. Consider, for example, what chance he will have, coming unexpectedly into the chamber of—"

I would have given much to have heard the balance of that conversation that I might have been warned of the perils of the way that lay ahead, but fate intervened, and just at the very instant of all other instants that I would not have elected to do it, I sneezed.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN.

THERE was nothing for it now other than to fight; nor did I have any advantage as I sprang, sword in hand, into the corridor before the two therns, for my untimely sneeze had warned them of my presence and they were ready for me.

There were no words, for they would have been a waste of breath. The very presence of the two proclaimed their treachery. That they were following to fall upon me unawares was all too plain, and they, of course, must have known that I understood their plan.

In an instant I was engaged with both, and though I loathe the very name of thern, I must in all fairness admit that they are mighty swordsmen; and these two were no exception, unless it were that they were even more

skilled and fearless than the average among their race.

While it lasted it was indeed as joyous a conflict as I had ever experienced. Twice at least I saved my breast from the mortal thrust of piercing steel only by the wondrous agility with which my earthly muscles endow me under the conditions of lesser gravity and air pressure upon Mars.

Yet even so I came near to tasting death that day in the gloomy corridor beneath Mars's southern pole, for Lakor played a trick upon me that in all my experience of fighting upon two planets I had never before witnessed the like of.

The other thern was engaging me at the time, and I was forcing him back —touching him here and there with my point until he was bleeding from a dozen wounds, yet not being able to penetrate his marvelous guard to reach a vulnerable spot for the brief instant that would have been sufficient to send him to his ancestors.

It was then that Lakor quickly unslung a belt from his harness, and as I stepped back to parry a wicked thrust he lashed one end of it about my left ankle so that it wound there for an instant, while he jerked suddenly upon the other end, throwing me heavily upon my back.

Then, like leaping panthers, they were upon me; but they had reckoned without Woola, and before ever a blade touched me a roaring embodiment of a thousand demons hurtled above my prostrate form and my loyal Martian calot was upon them.

Imagine, if you can, a huge grizzly with ten legs armed with mighty talons and an enormous froglike mouth splitting his head form ear to ear, exposing three rows of long, white tusks. Then endow this creature of your imagination with the agility and ferocity of a half-starved Bengal tiger and the strength of a span of bulls, and you will have some faint conception of Woola in action.

Before I could call him off he had crushed Lakor into a jelly with a single blow of one mighty paw, and had literally torn the other thern to ribbons; yet when I spoke to him sharply he cowed sheepishly as though he had done a thing to deserve censure and chastisement.

Never had I had the heart to punish Woola during the long years that had passed since that first day upon Mars when the green jed of the Tharks had placed him on guard over me, and I had won his love and loyalty from the cruel and loveless masters of his former life, yet I believe that he would have submitted to any cruelty that I might have inflicted upon him, so wondrous was his affection for me.

The diadem in the center of the circlet of gold upon the brow of Lakor proclaimed him a Holy Thern, while his companion, not thus adorned, was a lesser thern, though from his harness I gleaned that he had reached the Ninth Cycle, which is but one below that of the Holy Therns.

As I stood for a moment looking at the gruesome havoc Woola had wrought there recurred to me the memory of that other occasion upon which I had masqueraded in the wig, diadem, and harness of Sator Throg, the Holy Thern whom Thuvia of Ptarth had slain, and now it occurred to me that it might prove of worth to utilize Lakor's trappings for the same purpose.

A moment later I had torn his yellow wig from his bald pate and transferred it and the circlet, as well as all his harness, to my own person.

Woola did not approve of the metamorphosis. He sniffed at me and growled ominously, but when I spoke to him and patted his huge head he at length became reconciled to the change, and at my command trotted off along the corridor in the direction we had been going when our progress had been interrupted by the therns.

We moved cautiously now, warned by the fragment of conversation I had

overheard. I kept abreast of Woola that we might have the benefit of all our eyes for what might appear suddenly ahead to menace us, and well it was that we were forewarned.

At the bottom of a flight of narrow steps the corridor turned sharply back upon itself, immediately making another turn in the original direction, so that at that point it formed a perfect letter S, the top leg of which debouched suddenly into a large chamber, illy lighted, and the floor of which was completely covered by venomous snakes and loathsome reptiles.

To have attempted to cross that floor would have been to court instant death, and for a moment I was almost completely discouraged. Then it occurred to me that Thurid and Matai Shang with their party must have crossed it, and so there was a way.

Had it not been for the fortunate accident by which I overheard even so small portion of the therns' conversation we should have blundered at least a step or two into that wriggling mass of destruction, and a single step would have been all sufficient to have sealed our doom.

These were the only reptiles I had ever seen upon Barsoom, but I knew from their similarity to the fossilized remains of supposedly extinct species I had seen in the museums of Helium that they comprised many of the known prehistoric reptilian genera, as well as others undiscovered.

A more hideous aggregation of monsters had never before assailed my vision. It would be futile to attempt to describe them to earth-men, since substance is the only thing which they possess in common with any creature of the past or present with which you are familiar—even their venom is of an unearthly virulence that, by comparison, would make the cobra-di-capello seem quite as harmless as an angleworm.

As they spied me there was a concerted rush by those nearest the entrance where we stood, but a line of radium bulbs inset along the threshold of their chamber brought them to a sudden halt—evidently they dared not cross that line of light.

I had been quite sure that they would not venture beyond the room in which I had discovered them, though I had not guessed at what deterred them. The simple fact that we had found no reptiles in the corridor through which we had just come was sufficient assurance that they did not venture there.

I drew Woola out of harm's way, and then began a careful survey of as much of the chamber of reptiles as I could see from where I stood. As my eyes became accustomed to the dim light of its interior I gradually made out a low gallery at the far end of the apartment from which opened several exits.

Coming as close to the threshold as I dared, I followed this gallery with my eyes, discovering that it circled the room as far as I could see. Then I glanced above me along the upper edge of the entrance to which we had come, and there, to my delight, I saw an end of the gallery not a foot above my head. In an instant I had leaped to it and called Woola after me.

Here there were no reptiles—the way was clear to the opposite side of the hideous chamber—and a moment later Woola and I dropped down to safety in the corridor beyond.

Not ten minutes later we came into a vast circular apartment of white marble, the walls of which were inlaid with gold in the strange hieroglyphics of the First Born.

From the high dome of this mighty apartment a huge circular column extended to the floor, and as I watched I saw that it slowly revolved.

I had reached the base of the Temple of the Sun!

Somewhere above me lay Dejah Thoris, and with her were Phaidor, daughter of Matai Shang, and Thuvia of Ptarth. But how to reach them, now that I had found the only vulnerable spot in their mighty prison, was still a baffling riddle.

Slowly I circled the great shaft, looking for a means of ingress. Part way around I found a tiny radium flash torch, and as I examined it in mild curiosity as to its presence there in this almost inaccessible and unknown spot, I came suddenly upon the insignia of the house of Thurid jewel-inset in its metal case.

I am upon the right trail, I thought, as I slipped the bauble into the pocket-pouch which hung from my harness. Then I continued my search for the entrance, which I knew must be somewhere about; nor had I long to search, for almost immediately thereafter I came upon a small door so cunningly inlaid in the shaft's base that it might have passed unnoticed by a less keen or careful observer.

There was the door that would lead me within the prison, but where was the means to open it? No button or lock were visible. Again and again I went carefully over every square inch of its surface, but the most that I could find was a tiny pinhole a little above and to the right of the door's center—a pinhole that seemed only an accident of manufacture or an imperfection of material.

Into this minute aperture I attempted to peer, but whether it was but a fraction of an inch deep or passed completely through the door I could not tell—at least no light showed beyond it. I put my ear to it next and listened, but again my efforts brought negligible results.

During these experiments Woola had been standing at my side gazing intently at the door, and as my glance fell upon him it occurred to me to test the correctness of my hypothesis, that this portal had been the means of ingress to the temple used by Thurid and Matai Shang.

Turning away abruptly, I called to him to follow me. For a moment he hesitated, and then leaped after me, whining and tugging at my harness to draw me back. I walked on, however, some distance from the door before I let him have his way, that I might see precisely what he would do. Then I permitted him to lead me wherever he would.

Straight back to that baffling portal he dragged me, again taking up his position facing the blank stone, gazing straight at its shining surface. For an hour I worked to solve the mystery of the combination that would open the way before me.

Carefully I recalled every circumstance of my pursuit of Thurid, and my conclusion was identical with my original belief—that Thurid had come this way without other assistance than his own knowledge and passed through the door that barred my progress unaided from within. But how had he accomplished it?

I recalled the incident of the chamber of mystery in the Golden Cliffs that time I had freed Thuvia of Ptarth from the dungeon of the therns, and she had taken a slender, needlelike key from the key-ring of her dead jailer to open the door leading back into the chamber of mystery where Tars Tarkas fought for his life with the great banths. Such a tiny keyhole as now defied me had opened the way to the intricate lock in that other door.

Hastily I dumped the contents of my pocket-pouch upon the ground before me. Could I but find a slender bit of steel I might yet fashion a key that would give me ingress to the temple prison.

As I examined the heterogeneous collection of odds and ends that is always to be found in the pocket-pouch of a Martian warrior my hand fell upon the emblazoned radium flash torch of the black dator.

As I was about to lay the flash torch aside as of no value in my present predicament my eyes chanced upon a few characters roughly and freshly scratched upon the soft gold of the case.

Casual curiosity prompted me to decipher them, but what I read carried no immediate meaning to my mind.

There were three sets of characters, one below another:

3 |—| 50 T
1 |—| 1 Z
9 |—| 25 T

For only an instant my curiosity was piqued, and then I replaced the torch in my pocket-pouch, but my fingers had not unclasped from about it when there rushed from my memory the recollection of the conversation between Lakor and his companion when the lesser thern had quoted the words of Thurid and scoffed at them: "And what think you of the ridiculous matter of the light?" "Let the light shine with the intensity of three radium units for fifty tals"—ah, there was the first line of characters upon the torch's metal case—3—50 T; "and for one zat let it shine with the intensity of one radium unit"—there was the second line; "and then for twenty-five tals, nine units."

The formula was complete; but—what did it mean?

I thought I knew, and, seizing a powerful magnifying-glass from the litter of my pocket-pouch, I applied myself to a careful examination of the marble immediately about the pinhole in the door. I could have cried aloud in exultation when my scrutiny disclosed the almost invisible incrustation of particles of carbonized electrons which are thrown off by these Martian torches.

It was evident that for countless ages radium torches had been applied to this pinhole, and for what purpose there could be but a single answer—the mechanism of the lock was actuated by light-rays; and I, John Carter, Prince of Helium, held the combination in my hand—scratched by the hand of my enemy upon his own torch-case.

In a cylindrical bracelet of gold about my wrist was my Barsoomian chronometer—a delicate instrument that records the tals and zats and zodes of Martian time, presenting them to view beneath a strong crystal much after the manner of an earthly odometer.

Timing my operations carefully, I held the torch to the small aperture in the door, regulating the intensity of the light by means of the thumb-lever upon the side of the case.

For fifty tals I let three units of light shine full into the pinhole, then one unit for one zat, and for twenty-five tals nine units. Those last twenty-five tals were the longest twenty-five seconds of my life. Would the lock click at the end of those seemingly interminable intervals of time?

Twenty-three! Twenty-four! Twenty-five!

I shut off the light with a snap. For seven tals I waited—there had been no appreciable effect upon the lock's mechanism. Could it be that my theory was entirely wrong?

Hold! Had the nervous strain resulted in a hallucination, or did the door really move? Slowly the solid stone sank noiselessly back into the temple wall—there was no hallucination here.

Back and back it slid for ten feet until it had disclosed at its right a narrow doorway leading into a dark and narrow corridor that paralleled the outer wall. Scarcely was the entrance uncovered than Woola and I had leaped through—then the door slipped quietly back into place.

Down the corridor at some distance I saw the faint reflection of a light, and toward this we made our way. At the point where the light shone was a sharp turn, and a little distance beyond this a brilliantly lighted chamber.

Here we discovered a spiral stairway leading up from the center of the circular room.

Immediately I knew that we had reached the center of the base of the Temple of the Sun — the spiral runway led upward past the inner walls of the prison cells. Somewhere above me was Dejah Thoris, unless Thurid and Matai Shang had already succeeded in stealing her away.

We had scarcely started up the runway when Woola suddenly displayed the wildest excitement. He leaped

back and forth, snapping at my legs and harness, until I thought that he was mad, and finally when I pushed him from me and started once more to ascend he grasped my sword arm between his jaws and dragged me back.

No amount of scolding or cuffing would suffice to make him release me, and I was entirely at the mercy of his brute strength unless I cared to use my dagger upon him with my left hand; but, mad or no, I had not the heart to run the sharp blade into that faithful body.

Down into the chamber he dragged me, and across it to the side opposite that at which we had entered. Here was another doorway leading into a corridor which ran directly down a steep incline. Without a moment's hesitation Woola jerked me along this rocky passage.

Presently he stopped and released me, standing between me and the way we had come, looking up into my face as though to ask if I would now follow him voluntarily or if he must still resort to force.

Looking ruefully at the marks of his great teeth upon my bare arm I decided to do as he seemed to wish me to do. After all, his strange instinct might be more dependable than my faulty human judgment.

And well it was that I had been forced to follow him. But a short distance from the circular chamber we came suddenly into a brilliantly lighted labyrinth of crystal glass partitioned passages.

At first I thought it was one vast, unbroken chamber, so clear and transparent were the walls of the winding corridors, but after I had nearly brained myself a couple of times by attempting to pass through solid vitreous walls I went more carefully.

We had proceeded but a few yards along the corridor that had given us entrance to this strange maze when Woola gave mouth to a most frightful roar, at the same time dashing against the clear partition at our left.

The resounding echoes of that fearsome cry were still reverberating through the subterranean chambers when I saw the thing that had startled it from the faithful beast.

Far in the distance, dimly through the many thicknesses of intervening crystal, as in a haze that made them seem unreal and ghostly, I discerned the figures of eight people—three females and five men.

At the same instant, evidently startled by Woola's fierce cry, they halted and looked about. Then, of a sudden, one of them, a woman, held her arms out toward me, and even at that great distance I could see that her lips moved—it was Dejah Thoris, my ever beautiful and ever youthful Princess of Helium.

With her were Thuvia of Ptarth, Phaidor, daughter of Matai Shang, and Thurid, and the Father of Therns, and the three lesser therns that had accompanied them.

Thurid shook his fist at me, and then two of the therns grasped Dejah Thoris and Thuvia roughly by their arms and hurried them on. A moment later they had disappeared into a stone corridor beyond the labyrinth of glass.

They say that love is blind; but so great a love as that of Dejah Thoris that knew me even beneath the thern disguise I wore and across the misty vista of that crystal maze must indeed be far from blind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET TOWER.

I HAVE no stomach to narrate the monotonous events of the tedious days that Woola and I spent ferreting our way across the labyrinth of glass, through the dark and devious ways beyond that led beneath the Valley Dor and Golden Cliffs to emerge at last upon the flank of the Otz Mountains just above the Valley of Lost Souls—that pitiful purgatory peopled by the poor unfortunates who dare not con-

tinue their abandoned pilgrimage to Dor, or return to the various lands of the outer world from whence they came.

Here the trail of Dejah Thoris's abductors led along the mountains' base, across steep and rugged ravines, by the side of appalling precipices, and sometimes out into the valley, where we found fighting aplenty with the members of the various tribes that make up the population of this vale of hopelessness.

But through it all we came at last to where the way led up a narrow gorge that grew steeper and more impracticable at every step until before us loomed a mighty fortress buried beneath the side of an overhanging cliff.

Here was the secret hiding-place of Matai Shang, Father of Therns. Here, surrounded by a handful of the faithful, the hekkador of the ancient faith, who had once been served by millions of vassals and dependents, dispensed the spiritual word among the half dozen nations of Barsoom that still clung tenaciously to their false and discredited religion.

Darkness was just falling as we came in sight of the seemingly impregnable walls of this mountain stronghold, and lest we be seen I drew back with Woola behind a jutting granite promontory, into a clump of the hardy, purple scrub that thrives upon the barren sides of Otz.

Here we lay until the quick transition from daylight to darkness had passed. Then I crept out to approach the fortress walls in search of a way within.

Either through carelessness or overconfidence in the supposed inaccessibility of their hiding-place, the triple-barred gate stood ajar. Beyond were a handful of guards, laughing and talking over one of their incomprehensible Barsoomian games.

I saw that none of the guardsmen had been of the party that accompanied Thurid and Matai Shang; and so, relying entirely upon my disguise, I walked boldly through the gateway and up to the thern guard.

The men stopped their game and looked up at me, but there was no surprise upon their faces and no sign of suspicion. Similarly they looked at Woola, growling at my heel.

"Kaor!" I said in true Martian greeting, and the warriors arose and saluted me. "I have but just found my way hither from the Golden Cliffs," I continued, "and seek audience with the hekkador, Matai Shang, Father of Therns. Where may he be found?"

"Follow me," said one of the guard, and, turning, led me across the outer courtyard toward a second buttressed wall.

Why the apparent ease with which I seemingly deceived them did not rouse my suspicions I know not, unless it was that my mind was still so full of that fleeting glimpse of my beloved princess that there was room in it for naught else. Be that as it may, the fact is that I marched buoyantly behind my guide straight into the jaws of death.

Afterward I learned that thern spies had been aware of my coming for hours before I reached the hidden fortress.

The gate had been purposely left ajar to tempt me on. The guards had been schooled well in their part of the conspiracy; and I, more like a schoolboy than a seasoned warrior, ran headlong into the trap.

At the far side of the outer court a narrow door let into the angle made by one of the buttresses with the wall. Here my guide produced a key and opened the way within; then, stepping back, he motioned me to enter.

"Matai Shang is in the temple court beyond," he said; and as Woola and I passed through the fellow closed the door quickly upon us.

The nasty laugh that came to my ears through the heavy planking of the door after the lock clicked was my first intimation that all was not as it should be.

I found myself in a small, circular chamber within the buttress. Before me a door opened, presumably, upon the inner court beyond. For a moment I hesitated, all my suspicions now suddenly, though tardily, roused; then, with a shrug of my shoulders, I opened the door and stepped out into the glare of torches that lighted the inner court.

Directly opposite me a massive tower rose to a height of three hundred feet. It was of the strangely beautiful modern Barsoomian style of architecture, its entire surface hand-carved in bold relief with intricate and fanciful designs. Thirty feet above the courtyard and overlooking it was a broad balcony, and there, indeed, was Matai Shang, and with him were Thurid and Phaidor, Thuvia, and Dejah Thoris—the last two heavily ironed. A handful of thern warriors stood just behind the little party.

As I entered the enclosure the eyes of those in the balcony were full upon me.

An ugly smile distorted the cruel lips of Matai Shang. Thurid hurled a taunt at me and placed a familar hand upon the shoulder of my princess. Like a tigress she turned upon him, striking the beast a heavy blow with the manacles upon her wrist.

He would have struck back had not Matai Shang interfered, and then I saw that the two men were not overfriendly; for the manner of the thern was arrogant and domineering as he made it plain to the First Born that the Princess of Helium was the personal property of the Father of Therns. And Thurid's bearing toward the ancient hekkador savored not at all of liking or respect.

When the altercation in the balcony had subsided Matai Shang turned again to me.

"Earthman," he cried, "you have earned a more ignoble death than now lies within our weakened power to inflict upon you; but that the death you die to-night may be doubly bitter, know you that when you have passed, your widow becomes the wife of Matai Shang, hekkador of the Holy Therns, for a Martian year.

"At the end of that time, as you know, she shall be discarded, as is the law among us, but not, as is usual, to lead a quiet and honored life as high priestess of some hallowed shrine. Instead, Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, shall become the plaything of my lieutenants—perhaps of thy most hated enemy, Thurid, the black dator."

As he ceased speaking he awaited in silence evidently for some outbreak of rage upon my part — something that would have added to the spice of his revenge. But I did not give him the satisfaction that he craved.

Instead, I did the one thing of all others that might rouse his anger and increase his hatred of me; for I knew that if I died Dejah Thoris, too, would find a way to die before they could heap further indignities upon her.

Of all the holy of holies which the thern venerates and worships none is more revered than the yellow wig which covers his bald pate, and next thereto comes the circlet of gold and the great diadem, whose scintillant rays mark the attainment of the Tenth Cycle.

And, knowing this, I removed the wig and circlet from my head, tossing them carelessly upon the flagging of the court. Then I wiped my feet upon the yellow tresses; and as a groan of rage arose from the balcony I spat full upon the holy diadem.

Matai Shang went livid with anger, but upon the lips of Thurid I could see a grim smile of amusement, for to him these things were not holy; so, lest he should derive too much amusement from my act, I cried: "And thus did I with the holies of Issus, Goddess of Life Eternal, ere I threw Issus herself to the mob that once had worshiped her, to be torn to pieces in her own temple."

That put an end to Thurid's grinning, for he had been high in the favor of Issus.

"Let us have an end to this blaspheming!" he cried, turning to the Father of Therns.

Matai Shang rose and, leaning over the edge of the balcony, gave voice to the weird call that I had heard from the lips of the priests upon the tiny balcony upon the face of the Golden Cliffs overlooking the Valley Dor, when, in times past, they called the fearsome white apes and the hideous plantmen to the feast of victims floating down the broad bosom of the mysterious Iss toward the silian-infested waters of the Lost Sea of Korus.

"Let loose the death!" he cried, and immediately a dozen doors in the base of the tower swung open, and a dozen grim and terrible banths sprang into the arena.

This was not the first time that I had faced the ferocious Barsoomian lion, but never had I been pitted, single-handed, against a full dozen of them. Even with the assistance of the fierce Woola, there could be but a single outcome to so unequal a struggle.

For a moment the beasts hesitated beneath the brilliant glare of the torches; but presently their eyes, becoming accustomed to the light, fell upon Woola and me, and with bristling manes and deep-throated roars they advanced, lashing their tawny sides with their powerful tails.

In the brief interval of life that was left me I shot a last, parting glance toward my Dejah Thoris. Her beautiful face was set in an expression of horror; and as my eyes met hers she extended both arms toward me as, struggling with the guards who now held her, she endeavored to cast herself from the balcony into the pit beneath, that she might share my death with me. Then, as the banths were about to close upon me, she turned and buried her dear face in her arms.

Suddenly my attention was drawn toward Thuvia of Ptarth. The beautiful girl was leaning far over the edge of the balcony, her eyes bright with excitement.

In another instant the banths would be upon me, but I could not force my gaze from the features of the red girl, for I knew that her expression meant anything but the enjoyment of the grim tragedy that would so soon be enacted below her; there was some deeper, hidden meaning which I sought to solve.

For an instant I thought of relying on my earthly muscles and agility to escape the banths and reach the balcony, which I could easily have done, but I could not bring myself to desert the faithful Woola and leave him to die alone beneath the cruel fangs of the hungry banths; that is not the way upon Barsoom, nor was it ever the way of John Carter.

Then the secret of Thuvia's excitement became apparent as from her lips there issued the purring sound I had heard once before; that time that, within the Golden Cliffs, she called the fierce banths about her and led them as a shepherdess might lead her flock of meek and harmless sheep.

At the first note of that soothing sound the banths halted in their tracks, and every fierce head went high as the beasts sought the origin of the familiar call. Presently they discovered the red girl in the balcony above them, and, turning, roared out their recognition and their greeting.

Guards sprang to drag Thuvia away, but ere they had succeeded she had hurled a volley of commands at the listening brutes, and as one they turned and marched back into their dens.

"You need not fear them now, John Carter!" cried Thuvia, before they could silence her. "Those banths will never harm you now, nor Woola, either."

It was all I cared to know. There was naught to keep me from that balcony now, and with a long, running leap I sprang far aloft until my hands grasped its lowest sill.

In an instant all was wild confusion. Matai Shang shrank back. Thurid sprang forward with drawn sword to cut me down.

Again Dejah Thoris wielded her heavy irons and fought him back. Then Matai Shang grasped her about the waist and dragged her away through a door leading within the tower.

For an instant Thurid hesitated, and then, as though fearing that the Father of Therns would escape him with the Princess of Helium, he, too, dashed from the balcony in their wake.

Phaidor alone retained her presence of mind. Two of the guards she ordered to bear away Thuvia of Ptarth; the others she commanded to remain and prevent me from following. Then she turned toward me.

"John Carter," she cried, "for the last time I offer you the love of Phaidor, daughter of the Holy Hekkador. Accept and your princess shall be returned to the court of her grandfather, and you shall live in peace and happiness. Refuse and the fate that my father has threatened shall fall upon Dejah Thoris.

"You cannot save her now, for by this time they have reached a place where even you may not follow. Refuse and naught can save you; for, though the way to the last stronghold of the Holy Therns was made easy for you, the way hence hath been made impossible. What say you?"

"You knew my answer, Phaidor," I replied, "before ever you spoke. Make way," I cried to the guards, "for John Carter, Prince of Helium, would pass!"

With that I leaped over the low baluster that surrounded the balcony, and with drawn long-sword faced my enemies.

There were three of them; but Phaidor must have guessed what the outcome of the battle would be, for she turned and fled from the balcony the moment she saw that I would have none of her proposition.

The three guardsmen did not wait for my attack. Instead, they rushed me—the three of them simultaneously; and it was that which gave me an advantage, for they fouled one another in the narrow precincts of the balcony, so that the foremost of them stumbled full upon my blade at the first onslaught.

The red stain upon my point roused to its full the old blood-lust of the fighting man that has ever been so strong within my breast, so that my blade flew through the air with a swiftness and deadly accuracy that threw the two remaining therns into wild despair.

When at last the sharp steel found the heart of one of them the other turned to flee, and, guessing that his steps would lead him along the way taken by those I sought, I let him keep ever far enough ahead to think that he was safely escaping my sword.

Through several inner chambers he raced until he came to a spiral runway. Up this he dashed, I in close pursuit. At the upper end we came out into a small chamber, the walls of which were blank except for a single window overlooking the slopes of Otz and the Valley of Lost Souls beyond.

Here the fellow tore frantically at what appeared to be but a piece of the blank wall oposite the single window. In an instant I guessed that it was a secret exit from the room, and so I paused that he might have an opportunity to negotiate it, for I cared nothing to take the life of this poor servitor—all I craved was a clear road in pursuit of Dejeh Thoris.

But, try as he would, the panel would yield neither to cunning nor force, so that eventually he gave it up and turned to face me.

"Go thy way, thern," I said to him, pointing toward the entrance to the runway up which we had but just come. "I have no quarrel with you, nor do I crave your life. Go!"

For answer he sprang upon me with his sword, and so suddenly, at that, that I was like to have gone down before his first rush. So there was nothing for it but to give him what he sought, and that as quickly as might be, that I

might not be delayed too long in this chamber while Matai Shang and Thurid made way with Dejah Thoris and Thuvia of Ptarth.

The fellow was a clever swordsman —resourceful and extremely tricky. In fact, he seemed never to have heard that there existed such a thing as a code of honor, for he repeatedly outraged a dozen Barsoomian fighting customs that an honorable man would rather die than ignore.

He even went so far as to snatch his holy wig from his head and throw it in my face, so as to blind me for a moment while he thrust at my unprotected breast.

When he thrust, however, I was not there, for I had fought with therns before; and while none had ever resorted to precisely that same expedient, I knew them to be the least honorable and most treacherous fighters upon Mars, and so was ever on the alert for some new and devilish subterfuge when I was engaged with one of their race.

But at length he overdid the thing; for, drawing his short sword, he hurled it, javelinwise, at my body, at the same instant rushing upon me with his long sword. A single sweeping circle of my own blade caught the flying weapon and hurled it clattering against the far wall, and then, as I side-stepped my antagonist's impetuous rush, I let him have my point full in the stomach as he hurtled by.

Clear to the hilt my weapon passed through his body, and with a frightful shriek he sank to the floor, dead.

Halting only for the brief instant that was required to wrench my sword from the carcass of my late antagonist, I sprang across the chamber to the blank wall beyond, through which the thern had attempted to pass. Here I sought for the secret of its lock, but all to no avail.

In despair I tried to force the thing, but the cold, unyielding stone might well have laughed at my futile, puny endeavors. In fact, I could have sworn that I caught the faint suggestion of taunting laughter from beyond the baffling panel.

In disgust I desisted from my useless efforts and stepped to the chamber's single window.

The slopes of Otz and the distant Valley of Lost Souls held nothing to compel my interest then; but, towering far above me, the tower's carved wall riveted my keenest attention.

Somewhere within that massive pile was Dejah Thoris. Above me I could see windows. There, possibly, lay the only way by which I could reach her. The risk was great, but not too great when the fate of a world's most wondrous woman was at stake.

I glanced below. A hundred feet beneath lay jagged granite boulders at the brink of a frightful chasm upon which the tower abutted; and if not upon the boulders, then at the chasm's bottom, lay death, should a foot slip but once, or clutching fingers lose their hold for the fraction of an instant.

But there was no other way and with a shrug, which I must admit was half shudder, I stepped to the window's outer sill and began my perilous ascent aloft.

To my dismay I found that, unlike the ornamentation upon most Heliumatic structures, the edges of the carvings were quite generally rounded, so that at best my every hold was most precarious.

Fifty feet above me commenced a series of projecting cylindrical stones some six inches in diameter. These apparently circled the tower at six-foot intervals, in bands six feet apart; and as each stone cylinder protruded some four or five inches beyond the surface of the other ornamentation, they presented a comparatively easy mode of ascent could I but reach them.

Laboriously I climbed toward them by way of some windows which lay below them, for I hoped that I might find ingress to the tower through one of these, and thence an easier avenue along which to prosecute my search.

At times so slight was my hold upon

the rounded surfaces of the carving's edges that a sneeze, a cough, or even a slight gust of wind would have dislodged me and sent me hurtling to the depths below.

But finally I reached a point where my fingers could just clutch the sill of the lowest window, and I was on the point of breathing a sigh of relief when the sound of voices came to me from above through the open window.

"He can never solve the secret of that lock." The voice was Matai Shang's. "Let us proceed to the hangar above that we may be far to the south before he finds another way—should that be possible."

"All things seem possible to that vile calot," replied another voice, which I recognized as Thurid's.

"Then let us haste," said Matai Shang. "But to be doubly sure, I will leave two who shall patrol this runway. Later they may follow us upon another flier—overtaking us at Kaol."

My upstretched fingers never reached the window's sill. At the first sound of the voices I drew back my hand and clung there to my perilous perch, flattened against the perpendicular wall, scarce daring to breathe.

What a horrible position, indeed, in which to be discovered by Thurid! He had but to lean from the window to push me with his sword's point into eternity.

Presently the sound of the voices became fainter, and once again I took up my hazardous ascent; but now it was more difficult, since more circuitous, for I must climb so as to avoid the windows.

Matai Shang's reference to the hangar and the fliers indicated that my destination lay nothing short of the roof of the tower, and toward this seemingly distant goal I set my face.

The most difficult part of the journey was accomplished, and it was with relief that I felt my fingers close about the lowest of the stone cylinders.

It is true that these projections were too far apart to make the balance of the ascent anything of a sinecure, but I at least had always within my reach a point of safety to which I might cling in case of accident.

Some ten feet below the roof the wall inclined slightly inward possibly a foot in the last ten feet, and here the climbing was immeasurably easier, so that my fingers soon clutched the eaves.

As I drew my eyes above the level of the tower's top I saw a flier all but ready to rise.

Upon her deck was Matai Shang, Phaidor, Dejah Thoris, Thuvia of Ptarth, and a few thern warriors, while beside her stood Thurid in the act of clambering aboard.

He was not ten paces from me, facing in the opposite direction; and what cruel freak of fate should have caused him to turn about just as my eyes topped the roof's edge I may not even guess.

But turn he did; and when his eyes met mine his wicked face lighted with a malignant smile as he leaped toward me, where I was hastening to scramble to the secure footing of the roof.

Dejah Thoris must have seen me at the same instant, for she screamed a useless warning just as Thurid's foot, swinging in a mighty kick, landed full in my face.

Like a felled ox, I reeled and tumbled backward over the tower's side.

(To be continued.)

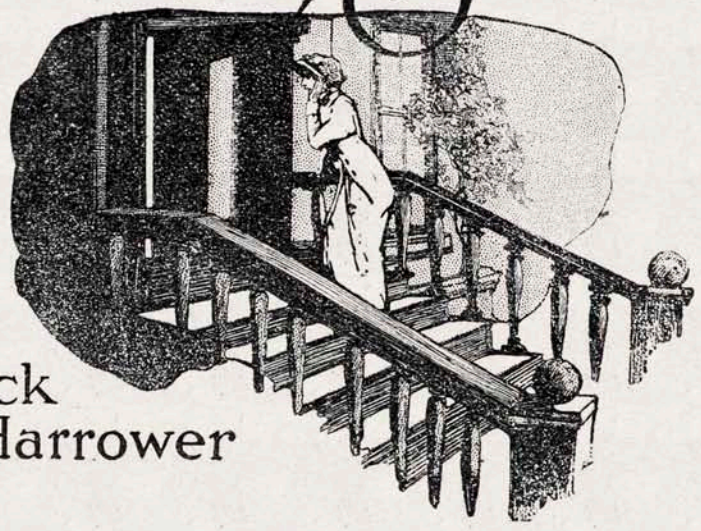
RESPICE FINEM.

By Francis Quarles.

MY soul, sit thou a patient looker-on;
Judge not the play before the play is done.
Her plot hath many changes; every day
Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the play.

The House of Sorcery

by Jack Harrower



SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CLIFF ELLIS, successful actor, is in love with Doris Armont. He follows her, discovers that she is apparently the ward of a grotesque doctor. Because of a mix-up concerning a friend of his, one Tom Bradworth, Ellis gets admittance to Doris's house, and, after a surprising conversation with her and Leidner, the doctor, agrees to become engaged to the young lady, though he has to promise to ask no questions and to curb his suspicions of whatever he may see or hear in the house.

Hardly is this agreement made when Kronholtz, an outsider, comes and demands a certain ring from Doris. Leidner forces her to give up this ring, but Ellis, unable to ask questions, yet filled with curiosity, follows the man who took the ring to an apartment hotel, where he finds a woman who calls herself Doris Armont, too.

From the latter he succeeds in rescuing the ring, but suddenly discovers that he is being spied upon by a man with remarkably piercing eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

ACTING OFF-STAGE.

THE man with the gray eyes stared. Our glances met; then instantly he looked away and became absorbed in studying the frescos round the ceiling. I sought to locate the girl I had tricked.

She was walking aimlessly to the center of the room; and a few feet away stood the individual who had been sent by Kronholtz to receive the ring, staring directly at me with a perplexed frown on his hang-dog features. He, too, had seen me recover the handkerchief, evidently noted my red carnation and my glance into my palm.

Quickly he strode to the woman's side, doffed his hat, and began speaking to her excitedly, nodding his head repeatedly in my direction. She turned, with a bewildered expression on her dark features, and surveyed me.

If my wish had not been working up to concert pitch at that very instant this story would never have been written—for the plan I then and there decided upon like a lightning-flash proved to be the pivot upon which all that follows turned.

I had the ring. But I needed more than that. I wanted the riddle of the ring. The girl probably knew. I would speak to her. A scheme unfolded to me as smoothly as if I had rehearsed

it for a month—an inspiration, if you like.

One glance I gave at the man opposite with the eyes of a hawk. He was still apparently absorbed in the frescoes around the ceiling. I would have to chance it with him.

Evidently he was after the ring, too. But it was very apparent that he was not playing the game with the girl and Kronholtz's emissary. So, placing the ring in my waistcoat-pocket, I started forward into the writing-room, walking a little irregularly, as a gentleman will who has imbibed somewhat freely.

My eyes were half shut; a vacuous smile adorned my face. I thanked my stars I was an actor.

I approached the perturbed couple, who realized that the wrong man had obtained the much-sought ring.

"Pardon me, madam," I addressed the woman, with my hat in my hand.

They both eyed me curiously, showing plainly their perturbation.

"You dropped your handk'chief by the door, an' I picked it up. An' you dropped—hic—a ring in m' hand. Yes—dropped ring in m' hand. Whatcher—got—say—hic—'bout it, eh?"

"Oh, sir, I just missed it," she smiled up into my face winningly. And when she smiled any inebriated gentleman would have given her his bank-roll; but I didn't happen to be drunk.

"You see, it must have fallen from my finger," she continued. "It is rather large, and when I took the handkerchief from you it fell into your hand. Thank you ever so much for returning it."

She held out her hand as if there was no question about my turning over the ornament. She was some actress herself.

"Madam," I said, shaking my head, pained and grieved, "I am—hic—under influ'nce liquor—sligh'ly, very sligh'ly. But I'm min'ster's son, I am. An' it pains—hic—me very much t' have beau'ful young lady fib t' me—hic—like that.

"Oh, yes—you fibbed t' me—yesy'did," I contended, shaking my finger at her reprovingly in answer to the indignant expression that shot from her eyes. They were wonderful eyes indeed—smoldering fires burning beneath them, which seemed to change their color and expression with every emotion of their owner.

"Lis'en here," I admonished, shaking my head solemnly. "Somethin's wrong—hic—very wrong—'cause I saw this gemman speak t' you like a stranger, an' you b-both looked—hic—over at me.

"You dropped that ring on p-purpose—oh, yes, y' did. You mistook me f'r him. He has beau'ful red carnashun—hic—an' I have beau'ful red carnashun. I may be drunk—hic—sligh'ly under influ'nce, y' know—but I'm wise—hic—betcherlife I'm wise!"

I smiled fatuously into her eyes, again shaking a reproving finger.

"Sir!" she exclaimed, simulating splendidly righteous indignation. "That is my husband's ring, and I demand that you return it, or I shall have an officer summoned."

"Oh, no, y' won't—no y' won't. You're in bad—y' know y'r in bad—hic—an' I know, too," I argued with the unreasoning stubbornness which liquor produces.

"Tell yer what," I continued, "if you'll send this—hic—gemman for y'r husban', an' he can 'dentify ring, well'n good. If not—hic—well'n good, also."

I waved my hand as if fate itself had decreed.

Standing a few steps in back of the woman was the man with the searchlight eyes, staring absorbedly up at the frescoes round the ceiling. But I noticed his ears—enormous lobes which seemed to be glued flat against the sides of his head—and I knew that they heard every word I uttered.

I purposely spoke loud enough for him to hear, for I would have to deal with him sooner or later, and I would give him something to guess about in the interim. I had already acquired an enormous respect for him. There was

something about the man that told me he was no infant with whom to match wits.

Meanwhile the strange eyes of the girl were studying me, changing expression with every thought of her agile brain. At last she came to a decision.

"Very well," she returned quietly. "And will you give my husband the ring if he identifies it?"

"'Suredly—hic—mos' 'suredly!" I affirmed. "I'm gemman of m' word, I am. Send this gemman for y' husban'—hic—an' we'll wait here f' him."

"All right," she agreed. "Pardon me a moment."

She stepped aside and spoke in a low, rapid tone to the fellow with the hang-dog countenance who had stood beside her throughout the interview, glowering at me with his watery, pale-blue little eyes. He looked as if he would have taken extreme delight in strangling me.

And I caught these words here and there: "Kronholtz — quickly — back here—hold him—the drunken fool!"

She returned in a moment, smiling very sweetly.

"Very well, sir. This gentleman will have my husband here in about half an hour. Shall we wait here?"

"'Suredly—hic—wait here wizzu—'f course."

She led the way to a writing-desk and seated herself. I drew another chair alongside and sat down somewhat unsteadily. I had accomplished something by getting rid of Kronholtz's man.

Now, to get some information, if possible, from this very clever young lady.

Even while I rested my elbow on the desk the man with the expressionless face and piercing gray eyes had sauntered over aimlessly, stationed himself three feet away, and again resumed his absorbed contemplation of the ceiling.

I chuckled to myself.

"I'll give you a run for your money," I thought; and then addressed myself to the girl before me, who was striving hard to conceal her irritation at what she supposed my drunken meddling.

"Sorry t' trouble a lady—hic—but I'm married m'self," I began. "Got three chil'ren—beau'ful wife. I believe in p-preservin' san-sanctity of the home. An' you—married lady—meet man—hic—strange man—wizzer ring—poor husban's ring. Looks bad—hic—v-very bad."

Her long, slender fingers, resting on the desk before her, seemed to be itching to tear my hair, while those extraordinary eyes smoldered with suppressed fury. But she evidently had come to the conclusion that the best plan was to humor me and endeavor to exercise her charms to overcome my suspicions.

"Oh, sir, you do me a terrible injustice!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling, her eyes now pathetic and beseeching. "You are a gentleman, I can see. Therefore, you will reserve your suspicions until they are proved, and not cast aspersions on my good name.

"When my husband arrives he will explain everything to your entire satisfaction."

Yes, the stage certainly lost an accomplished artist when this girl turned adventuress.

I wondered just how it could be explained; and even while she spoke my eyes fell upon a gold mesh hand-bag which she had placed on the edge of the desk beside my elbow. And through the open chainwork I descried two keys—evidently the keys to apartment No. 12. Again my wits served me right royally.

"M'dear madam," I began apologetically. "I—hic—beg y'umble—hic—p-pardon for—"

And just then my unsteady elbow slipped and knocked the gold mesh-bag to the floor at my feet. I stooped to recover it, deftly opened the catch, palmed the two keys, and closed the bag again before my wabbly hand replaced it on the table.

She could not see the manipulation, for the top of the desk obstructed her range of vision. But some one else saw.

As I raised my head from the floor two gray eyes were boring down, watching every movement of my filching fingers. But as I replaced the bag on the desk those search-light eyes in their expressionless frame were again glued ceilingward.

"I beg y'umble pardon," I continued my interrupted apology. "Didn't mean t' hurt y' feelings. I'll r'serve—hic—my decishun till husban' arrives—so I will. Will y' ex'use me minute? Got t' tel'phone—hic—m' wife won't be home f'r 'n hour."

"Certainly," she conceded, smiling graciously, very well pleased with the favorable impression she was apparently making.

I zigzagged over to two telephone booths alongside the door. They contained slot machines, and thus required no operator, for which I was thankful. I entered one and closed the sliding glass door behind me.

The man with the face of a mummy and a hobby for studying interior decorations was sauntering into the adjoining booth.

"Sound proof—these booths," I chuckled to myself. "Mr. Gimlet-Eyes will be fooled."

I dropped a nickel in the slot and called the number the occupant of apartment No. 12 had given me some half hour or so ago. And when the German accent voiced its "Hello," I answered, imitating the girl's voice to a nicety.

I had been studying its every inflection while she spoke to me. That had been my specialty in the St. Louis Stock Company — impersonations; and it stood me in good stead at this very moment.

"Hello," I responded in the girl's rich, musical tones, "do you know who is speaking?"

"Yah," he returned at once. "Vat iss der matter? Didn't my man arrive?"

"Yes," I replied. Then I told him in a few rapid words just what had happened.

He swore very fluently, considering that the English language handicapped him, and utterly regardless of the fact that a "lady" was on the other end of the wire. I interrupted his flow of brimstone.

"Listen to me!" I called sharply. "It is all right, now. After I sent your man to fetch you, I succeeded in wheedling this drunken fool into giving me the ring."

"Ach! *Himmel!* You're a peach—von big peach!" he shouted over the wire.

"As soon as your man arrives," I continued, "send him at once to the lobby of the Garford Hotel on Broadway. I'll meet him there in about half an hour—as soon as I can get rid of this drunken fool—and give him the ring."

"Goot! Here he iss now."

"All right—good-by."

Highly pleased with my successful effort at imitating the girl's voice, I dropped another nickel in the slot.

"Now, to fool her own brother," I told myself, and gave the number of the apartment-house where he resided, which I had noted carefully while sitting at the switchboard. A good memory is a handy thing in cases like this.

In a moment my colored friend was connecting me with apartment No. 12.

"Hello," the girl's voice greeted her brother, "I'm talking to you from the Willington."

I shivered in my boots for fear he would detect the impersonation. But no.

"Yes—did you pass the ring along all right?"

"No," I replied, and told him briefly what had transpired.

Not being handicapped like Kronholtz, he swore rapidly and volubly, with great picturesqueness.

"Listen to me," I interrupted. "I have persuaded this drunken fool to go with me to the Hotel Saint Claire. You are supposed to be my husband, and are stopping there—understand?

"He says he will give up the ring if you can describe it, so it is not so

bad after all. I will meet you in the lobby of the Saint Claire in half an hour. Be sure to be there."

"You bet I will! Good-by."

Immensely pleased, I dropped another nickel in the slot and called Max Leidner's number. As luck would have it Doris herself answered.

"Hello. This is Cliff Ellis."

"Yes; what's the matter?" came her wondering question.

"Can't explain now. I want you to do something. Call up Mr. King at number Double-O-three Madison Square. That is the number of the Hotel Willington, where I am now. I am Mr. King, understand. Tell the operator to have me paged in the writing-room. Telephone immediately."

"Yes," came her quick response. "Good-by."

"Good-by," I said, and again walked unsteadily across the room and rejoined the girl, who was sitting patiently where I left her. As I took my seat beside her at the desk the man with the gimlet eyes had already emerged from the other telephone booth and was sauntering casually toward us.

"M'wife was out — hic — visitin' frien'," I informed the girl with the changeable eyes. "So I talked wiz daughter—beau'ful little g-girl—hic—m'daughter is, betcherlife. Her muzzer's goin' call me soon's she—"

"Mr. King—Mr. King!" cried a young man in uniform, paging through the writing-room.

"There she is now," I said. "Holy smoke! If m' wife saw me sittin' here wizzu—good night! Very j-jealous woman—m' wife," I smiled stupidly at my companion. "'Xcuse me once more—hic—please. Be back in minute."

She bowed a smiling acquiescence as I rose and followed the boy. As I turned into the lobby I could see the man with the expressionless face standing near the girl at the desk, staring up steadfastly at the ceiling.

"He figures it's best to watch her," I reflected. "Very good. It would have been a hard job to lose him."

I took the call in a booth which one of the operators at the switchboard indicated.

"Hello, Doris!" I said. "You've done well. That's all I wanted—to be called so I could get away from a certain party. Will explain later. See you as soon as I can. I've got the ring. Good-by."

Without losing any time I hurried across the lobby and out on Broadway, very well pleased with my impromptu performance.

"Now for a little investigation," I mused, wending my way back toward the house from which Doris Armont No. 2 had emerged.

I had the girl's keys to apartment No. 12, and I might find papers there which would throw some light on this baffling riddle of the ring. Her brother would have left by this time to meet his sister at the Saint Claire, and thus the apartment would be open for my inspection. Kronholtz's man would be on his way to the Garford Hotel. He would get tired waiting for the girl after an hour, and return to report to his employer. Then Kronholtz would telephone apartment No. 12 to find nobody there, and then rush to the Willington to try and trace the girl.

After her brother became tired of waiting at the Saint Claire the probabilities were that he would go to the Willington also. Meanwhile the girl would become uneasy at my non-appearance, but I counted on her deciding to wait there, trusting that I would eventually return.

She would be afraid to leave the writing-room and thus lose all chance of recovering the ring. I ought to have a clear road in my investigation for the next hour, at least.

"Gee! Won't they be mad when they all meet in the Willington and compare notes?" I chuckled. "Wonder how in blazes Mr. Gimlet-Eyes became mixed up—"

"Good evening, Mr. Ellis."

Somebody had tapped me gently on the shoulder.

Annoyed at being recognized, and possibly interrupted in my mission, I turned and there was Mr. Gimlet-Eyes, no longer with a face like a stone image, but smiling blandly up into my face!

CHAPTER VIII.

APARTMENT NO. 12.

I COULD only stare at him, wondering stupidly how he knew my name.

"You worked that pretty slick—yes, very slick," he confided, still smiling genially. "You are a good actor—on and off the stage. Rather out of your line, though, isn't it?"

"Sir!" I exclaimed angrily, knowing not what to say.

I could have knocked him down, so mad was I at this unexpected stumbling-block to my little scheme.

"Tut, tut!" he remonstrated, taking my arm like a good fellow will, and starting along Broadway with me. "Don't let's lose precious time standing here. We must get back to apartment No. 12, and see what there is to see."

I nearly dropped to the sidewalk. How the devil did he know I was bound for apartment No. 12? He noted my surprise with a little smile across his wide mouth which almost severed his face in half.

"Come on," he urged, walking ahead. "We'll talk as we walk."

There was nothing else to do. I certainly couldn't lose him just now.

"What makes you think I'm bound for this place you mention?" I asked, staring at him as we hurried along.

"Didn't you pinch the young lady's keys?" he parried with another question and a confiding smile.

It was wonderful what a transformation came over that mummy face when its owner talked and smiled. It was now the most keenly intelligent face I had ever observed.

"What business is it of yours—" I began, my anger rising rapidly.

"As much my business as yours," he interrupted genially. "Please don't let's argue. Time is precious. We'll have about an hour to search. Her brother will leave the apartment and wait for her at the Saint Claire.

"Kronholtz's man will be waiting at the Garford Hotel. And when they all take a tumble and meet the girl at the Willington, there'll be some fireworks, believe me!"

I stopped short in the middle of the hurrying swirl of people on the crowded avenue, and stared with mouth agape at this astonishing creature beside me. How in the name of sorcery did he know all this? Then I voiced my conviction in stammering words:

"Are—are you—a mind-reader?"

"No—only a good listener."

"But I was in a sound-proof telephone booth!" I ejaculated.

"See these ears?" He pointed a stubby finger to his nearest ear—one of those immense organs which seemed glued to the side of his head.

It was different from any human ear I had ever seen. It was remarkably thin—almost transparent near the edges; and the orifice was exceedingly large, curving back into the head with a long sweep which gave his whole ear the general appearance of the horn of a talking-machine.

"I have the best hearing of any man on earth," he continued easily. "I could almost have heard every word of your impersonating voice if I had stood outside on the floor of the writing-room."

"By gad, I believe you could!" I admitted, staring admiringly at that extraordinary appendage.

Again he had my arm and was hurrying me swiftly along. We turned a corner and started east on the street where Doris Armont No. 2 lived.

"And I suppose you heard every word I said to the girl," I conceded, utterly upset.

"You bet I did. Jiminy—it was rich!" he chuckled gleefully. "I've always prided myself on being quick-witted, but I'm a humble disciple of yours after this."

"You seem to think that I'm going to cultivate your acquaintance from now on," I voiced sarcastically. "You're very much mistaken. I'm going to side-track you at the first opportunity."

His immense mouth opened in a cheerful grin.

"You're not dealing with a woman now," he informed graciously. "Besides, you and I have interests in common. We can't afford to quarrel—at least, not until after we have ransacked apartment No. 12."

I did some rapid thinking. Maybe he was right. He was playing against this girl and her brother just like myself. He was certainly resourceful, and our combined wits ought to work well together—for a time. I suddenly thought that he might know the riddle of the ring.

"You're right," I conceded amiably. "It's a bargain. What do you know about this ring?"

"What do you know?" he retorted.

"I asked you first."

"I know a whole lot—but I won't tell you just now. We can discuss that later. We have work ahead."

"What's your plan?" I asked, mentally vowing that I would not now lose sight of him for a good deal.

He knew the riddle of the ring. Good!—and I'd know it soon if I had to choke it out of him. But I realized it would be quite a choking operation, for, though much below the average in height, he was as wiry as an eel and as stocky as a young bull. Besides, he was no fool.

"My plan is simple," he informed. "I'll take the keys and go into apartment No. 12. The windows face on an empty lot on the east side. You station yourself on the sidewalk, in view of these windows. I'll throw one open when I enter. If you see the girl or her brother— By the way, do you know her brother by sight?"

"Yes."

"Good. If either of them returns before I finish my investigation, you whistle, and I'll come out into the hall and down the stairs."

"Very nice," I responded dryly. "And you get all the information—and keep it."

"You can go into the apartment, then," he answered readily, "and I'll keep watch on the sidewalk. The only reason I suggested my going in was that I have a pretty good idea where and for what to search. If you have, also, why, go ahead. I'm satisfied either way—so long as we get the information."

He was evidently perfectly frank in the matter, and I didn't know where and for what to search.

"No—you search," I conceded.

"And if either of them returns before I'm through," he went on, "you whistle, and then follow up the stairs, and I'll meet you there and we'll try something else I have in mind."

"Very well," I agreed, as we came near the house. I handed him the two keys I had taken from the girl's mesh bag.

Arrived at the door, I saw that the young negro was up through the building somewhere with the elevator.

"Now's your chance before the elevator-boy comes down," I said. "Good luck!"

He shot into the corridor and up the stairway like a monkey. I walked to the east end of the buliding, in front of the vacant lot, where I could scan the windows.

In a minute a light shone in the front apartment on the second floor, and a moment later my new acquaintance's chunky form appeared at a window. He threw up the sash, lowered the curtain half-way, waved his hand at me, and disappeared to commence his search.

I paced quietly up and down, keeping a watchful eye for the return of the girl or her brother.

I tried to figure out just what interest this astounding stranger had in the affair. It was beyond me—like a good many other remarkable things

which had transpired in this remarkable day.

I had developed an enormous respect for the possessor of the wireless-telegraph ears in my short acquaintance—also an unaccountable liking. He was a man after my own heart; and his astonishingly shrewd gray eyes had a very frank expression for one engaged in such shady proceedings.

A half-hour passed. It seemed like two hours to me. I was growing momentarily very nervous. Ever and anon the quick-moving shadow of my companion in crime was thrown against one of the lighted windows as he searched through the apartment.

Evidently his efforts were proving unavailing.

Then, crossing Madison Avenue and coming down the street with quick steps, I descried the figure of the girl's brother whom I had followed from Max Leidner's home. I whistled sharply.

Immediately the lights were extinguished in apartment No. 12, and I shot through the doorway and into the corridor. The elevator had just ascended with a lady who preceded me a few seconds before. I sprang up the stairway and met my companion on the first landing, coming down.

"Armont is returning," I said in a hurried whisper. "What luck?"

"Couldn't find a thing. Listen now to my plan. As soon as he enters his apartment we'll knock on the door. By the way, does he know you by sight?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"We'll chance it, then. I'll inform him that we are central-office men in search of a man who was seen by a passer-by on the street climbing down the fire-escape of this house from the roof. As we noticed a window of his apartment open, we think he entered there, and is in hiding.

"If he thinks—as he probably will—that it has some connection with this matter of the ring, he will in all probability rush at once for the place where he secretes the documents I—we are looking for. That will give you your cue to steer him into another part of the apartment, and I'll secure the evidence. Are you on?"

"Yes."

By this time Armont, on the floor below, was pressing the electric button to summon the elevator. Just then it passed on the way down. We stepped back in the hallway and waited.

In a minute it was ascending again, stopped at the floor above, and we heard Armont step out and open the door of apartment No. 12. For another half-minute we waited till the elevator returned to the main floor.

"Here," spoke my companion, handing me a revolver. "Stick it in your pocket, and when we start to search pull it like a real detective. Come on."

I followed him up the stairway to the next floor.

He rang the bell of No. 12 violently. Almost instantly it opened, and for the first time I caught a view of George Armont's face.

It was not prepossessing—sallow skin, a drooping blond mustache, with a shifty look in his black, close-set eyes. He stared at us inquiringly.

"We're central-office men," spoke my companion bruskly, in a low tone, throwing back his coat and displaying some sort of a shield. "Somebody on the street saw a man come down the fire-escape from the roof of this house and disappear in a window of your apartment."

He stepped in confidently and I followed.

"With your permission we'll search."

Armont fell back, flustered, alarm showing plainly on his sallow features.

"Yes-es—certainly—go ahead," he stammered, turning and rushing into the dining-room.

"The window's open!" he exclaimed, pointing to it. "I didn't notice—I just came in myself."

Quickly he turned, pulled open the lowest drawer of a small bureau by the wall, threw out some wearing apparel,

and touched a small, square tin box which was thus revealed; then, with a sigh of relief, closed the drawer again. My companion looked at me significantly as the proprietor turned to face us again.

"We'll search through the rooms," my fellow-conspirator said.

I started for the rear, through a long hall, and Armont followed me. With drawn revolver I covered the premises, searching systematically in every closet or other place likely to afford concealment.

Armont watched expectantly over my shoulder. I finished at last.

"Must have escaped through the door into the hall," I said. "Guess he had robbed an apartment in some neighboring house, and just used your flat as a means of escape."

"Yes—I guess so," replied the man, much relieved, evidently assured that the intruder was not involved in the affair of the ring.

We returned to the dining-room.

"I've searched the front," said my friend, awaiting us there, and returning his gun to his hip-pocket. "Guess he got out through the hall door."

"Yes—he escaped through this apartment," I contributed. "Robbed some apartment next door, maybe, and then came down this fire-escape."

"Guess you're right," responded the other fake detective. "Let's get after him. The elevator-boy must have seen him go down-stairs."

We moved to the door. I was speculating as to where he had placed the tin box. It was too bulky to conceal about his person.

"Sorry to trouble you," he said to Armont apologetically as we stepped into the hall.

"Not at all," responded the other, and closed the door.

My companion hurried down the stairs and was out on the street before I caught up to him.

"Where's the box?" I queried, puzzled.

He grinned, and, passing to the east side of the house, dived into the vacant lot.

Stooping, he picked something up off the ground in the shadow beside the wall.

He rejoined me, the tin box tucked snugly under his arm, and from which he was in the act of breaking a long piece of twine, which he stowed carefully in his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME SWIFT SIDE-STEPPING.

MR. GIMLET-EYES turned westward on emerging from the lot and started ahead at a rapid pace, I keeping close beside him—on the side nearest the tin box. If he tried to elope with that article, his face was doomed to come into violent contact with a brace of hard knuckles.

"Lowered it from the window on a string?" I said, by way of starting conversation.

"Yep—which teaches a moral: Always carry a piece of twine in your pocket," replied he. "I remember once in Australia when a piece of cotton thread saved my life. Good story, that.

"And this detective's shield I worked on our friend is a handy thing, too. If Armont had taken time to examine it, we would never have got the tin box."

"Why?"

"New York cabman's license—vintage of seventy-seven. Picked it up in a pawn-shop years ago. Always carry it with me when in this town—always."

"I see you have studied your—er—art down to a fine point," I ventured to remark.

"Got nothing on you, Cliff Ellis—not a thing. That drunken society man stunt you pulled on the lady was about as nifty a piece of work as I ever saw."

His expansive mouth opened again to emit a hearty chuckle; then he com-

menced intoning, in a sing-song, this little gem:

By chance I met an actor-man,
Who acted the thief as good as I can.
Oh-ho! He-ho!

His voice was about as musical as a ton of coal sliding down an iron chute.

"That's a pretty little thing," I commented. "But don't do it often. My musical ear is rather sensitive."

"Oh, I always sing when I arrive at a conclusion," he replied, unabashed.

"Really. And what conclusion might you have arrived at now?"

"That there is something in back of all your acting to-night."

"Well, I'm not qualifying for Blackwell's Island for the fun of the thing," I agreed. "And by the same token, I opine that you are not, either."

"You opine correctly," he came back laconically.

"Where are you steering for now?" I queried.

"To my little three-room flat—this street—other side of Broadway. The tin box is locked, and we'll have to pry it open."

"By the way, how did you know I was Cliff Ellis?"

"Saw you in 'The Perfect Woman' last week. Never forget a face if I flash it for a minute or so."

"I believe it," I assented, gazing sidewise at those search-light eyes of his, to find that they were observing me the same way. "And might I ask your name?"

"You might."

"Which is—"

"A difficult question to answer. I have so many. At present it is—but that wouldn't enlighten you any. I only christened myself with it three days ago."

"I see—your term just expired. Starting life all over again, eh? How long were you up for this last trip?"

"You're away off, Cliff Ellis," he corrected—"away off. I've just been acting the thief like yourself. But as I remarked before—I'm your humble disciple. Some swift side-stepping to-night, Cliff, my boy.

"You pinched the ring—got rid of Kronholtz's man—then pinched the keys—got Armont out of the way—flagged the lady—and then pinched the tin box from under its owner's very nose. Some swift side-stepping—yes, sir!"

"You pinched the tin box," I disclaimed the honor frankly. "And it was your scheme. It worked admirably."

"Yes—it will work every time under like conditions. A trait in human nature, you know. A person will grab instinctively for that which he or she prizes most in time of danger. That's what Armont did."

"And does he prize the tin box more than anything else?" I asked innocently.

He was looking at me sidewise again.

"Maybe," was all the satisfaction he vouchsafed. "Well, here we are."

We had crossed Broadway, and my companion turned into the doorway of a flat-house in the center of the block on the up-town side. He opened the inner door with a latchkey, and led the way inside the hall.

He applied another key to a door on the west side, and held it open for me to enter, touching a button and flooding the room with electric light.

I looked about curiously. It was a simply furnished sitting-room, showing evidences of a careless bachelor's home life. He motioned me to a chair, offered me a box of cigars, and placing the tin box carefully on the mantel, sat opposite me in an armchair, puffing voluminously on the weed he had selected. He seemed in no haste. I was.

"Let's open that tin box," I suggested politely.

"Just a moment," he said. "First let's see if we can't arrive at an understanding. Our interests seem to run parallel—apparently.

"You are playing against Armont

and his crowd. So am I. You are looking for the information in this tin box. So am I. What's the answer?"

"Yes—what's the answer?" I murmured.

"Do you mind telling me how you knew the girl started out with that ring to the Willington?" he asked offhandedly.

"I heard her brother phone Kronholtz and make the arrangements for passing it along. In fact, I gave him the connection on the switchboard."

It occurred to me if I simulated frankness with him he might loosen up with a little information himself.

"Ah, I see. But how did you happen to be on the switchboard?"

"How did you happen to be waiting outside the door?" I parried. "Seems to me you're getting more knowledge than you give."

"I generally do," he admitted candidly, his mouth spreading earward in that large smile. "If I could only figure out," he went on musingly, staring up at the ceiling as if thinking aloud, "how a Broadway star is mixed up in a matter concerning an old ring, I might be able to talk with freedom."

"I'll save you the trouble of talking or figuring," I said grimly, rising suddenly and pointing his own revolver within an inch of one of those immense ears. I couldn't waste any more time with this up-to-date Sphinx. It was easier to just take what I wanted.

"Now, don't stir a finger," I warned, moving guardedly toward the tin box on the mantel in back of him.

He grinned.

"That gun's empty."

I stared at the barrel. Sure enough, no cartridges were there. I threw it on a near-by table with a few choice words. And when I glanced savagely at the grinning man in the armchair, it was I who stared into the muzzle of a vicious-looking gun.

"I'll trouble you, Cliff Ellis, to pass over that ring," he said softly, without stirring from his seat.

It was my turn to grin.

"While you were up-stairs in apartment No. 12," I informed him cheerfully, "a messenger-boy came along the street. I had an inspiration.

"I stopped him, placed the ring in an envelope, sealed it, and scribbled my own name and address upon it. By this time it is reposing in pigeon-hole 'E' in back of the clerk's desk at my hotel."

His jaw dropped; his keen eyes scanned mine, nonplussed.

"Search me," I encouraged, throwing my arms above my head, still grinning.

He merely threw his gun after mine on the table, and also voiced a few choice words.

"Mine's empty, too," he advertised with an answering grin. "One has to be so careful nowadays with the New York police. They're so peevish about anybody but themselves carrying anything loaded. Well, you worked it pretty slick, I must admit. But then I might have known—"

A strangled, hoarse cry broke in on his discourse, coming apparently from the darkness at the front end of his three-room flat:

"Help!—help!—he's murdering me—help—he—"

The voice died away in a choking sob.

My companion sprang from his chair and shot through an adjoining bedchamber to the front room.

"Help! Police!" sounded the voice, now shrilly, this time seemingly from out-of-doors, on the sidewalk.

I was on the other side of the hall door in a jiffy, my host tumbling back through the flat after me. I threw open the street door and dashed to the sidewalk.

There was nothing but a deserted stretch of flagged pavements confronting my eyes. My host stood framed in the doorway, staring at me mystified.

"Good night, my friend," I gibed him with a laugh, waving the tin box tauntingly in his face.

I had picked it from the mantel the moment he jumped into the other room.

"As well as impersonating, I can also spring a little ventriloquism on occasions," I added. "And here is the ring also," I enlightened him, pulling it from my vest-pocket and holding it up in my other hand for his inspection. "Ta-ta, dear pal. Some swift side-stepping, old top!" I mocked, laughing cruelly at him, as I slowly turned toward Broadway.

He merely stood there with that wide grin on his face, nodding his head admiringly, a twinkle in his gray eyes.

With the tin box hugged close to my side I left him thus, and strode right merrily away.

And the balmy air of that June night was disturbed, as, singing blithesomely at the top of my lungs, in imitation of that coal-scuttle voice, his own original little ditty floated back to its composer's ears:

"By chance I met an actor-man,
Who acted the thief as good as I can.
O-ho! He-ho!"

At the corner of Broadway I turned north, glancing back for a last view of my partner in house-breaking. He was still standing on the stoop of his house, gazing after me.

What was the next thing on the program? I pondered. It was now after eleven o'clock.

What strange proceedings might have transpired in Max Leidner's house of sorcery since my departure at nine in pursuit of the ring? I was very anxious to know. And yet, here was this tin box, stowed under my arm.

Perhaps its contents would make plain many of the *bizarre* and unnerving episodes which had mystified me this day. Yes; I must investigate my twice-stolen treasure before rejoining Doris Armont in that Madison Avenue house. Then I could better determine my next move.

With the knowledge thus gained, I might be able to return and force Mr. Gimlet-eyes to disgorge the riddle of the ring which I was confident he possessed.

So, coming to this conclusion after walking several blocks, I turned to cross over to the east side of the avenue and board an up-town surface car to my hotel at Forty-Second Street. In doing so I almost collided with two men directly behind me, who were in the midst of an angry altercation as they walked.

"You know where she is!" shouted the smaller man of the two to his burly companion. "I'll follow you till I find out. You cur! You've broken up my home—robbed me of my wife. And you'll settle with me—I'll shoot you like a dog!"

And he made a movement toward his hip-pocket.

It looked as if I was about to witness a murder. I dropped in line in back of them, ready to grab his arm if he started anything. The little fellow's other hand was excitedly clutching the arm of the giant towering beside him.

"Let go, you little runt!" growled the big fellow, trying to disengage his arm, and keeping a wary eye on his outraged companion. "You're crazy. I don't know where your wife is. Let go—I say!"

But the small chap was now hanging desperately onto his arm with both his hands. The other lifted his free arm, the massive paw clenched, and started a vicious swing for the jaw of his undersized antagonist.

I had come up alongside, and as the flail-like arm swung I jumped in front to protect the little fellow, and with my free hand grasped the wrist of the other and pushed it to his side.

"You big bully!" I said. "You ought to be shot for trying anything like that on a man his size."

My blood was up; I never could tolerate a bully.

He glared at me, taken aback at this unexpected interference.

"Who gave you a license to stick your nose in other folks' affairs?" he sneered. "You dressed-up dude, maybe you think you are my size, then?"

He sprang back quickly and squared

off belligerently, at the same time starting that big arm of his swinging dangerously again.

"Look out!" shouted the little fellow, whose grip on the other's arm had been shaken off easily.

Already a crowd of people was rapidly collecting about us, men running from all directions to see the commotion. A street fight in New York can produce an audience quicker than any other attraction on earth.

I did not relish such notoriety, but my antagonist had accompanied his swinging arm with a few low-spoken words which were anything but complimentary.

"Here!" I said to the little chap beside me whose cause I was championing.

I gave him the tin box to hold and threw up my guard, swinging my own right as a certain notable ring-artist had once taught me.

My opponent's demeanor suddenly changed. A slinking look came over his bullying face, and, apparently losing all desire for an encounter on seeing my readiness, turned and ducked quickly through the crowd.

I started after him, but the curious onlookers had pressed in about me, and he was soon out of sight.

I looked around for the little chap with the tin box.

And he also had disappeared.

"Some swift side-stepping, Cliff Ellis," a familiar voice murmured behind me, "some swift side-stepping, old pal."

I spun round on my heel. Mr. Gimlet-eyes was looking up into my countenance with that all-embracing smile of his.

"Or, as one would say, in the language of the classics: Stung!" he supplemented unnecessarily.

I could not muster even a stage grin. But I had once worked among 'longshoremen, and I now recalled some of their inimitable language, giving audible expression to my recollections.

The crowd of disappointed fight-fans had melted as swiftly as it gathered. We two stood there facing each other, under the garish lights of the Great White Way.

"Pretty tough, old pal," that cavern-mouth was voicing in mock sympathy. "Pretty tough after pulling that ventriloquist stuff, to fall down thusly. Ah, well, 'tis the fortune of war."

"Cease your idle prattle," I said, recovering somewhat of my aplomb. "Tell me—how did you stage this act on such short notice?"

There was far more than the ordinary amount of curiosity in my tones.

"Fate was kind, brother—very kind," he obliged cheerfully. "No sooner had you turned the corner of my street than my two men appeared coming from Sixth Avenue. And as we three followed swiftly in your footsteps I originated the act then and there, and rehearsed them in their parts. Pretty good for a first performance, eh?"

"Very good," I agreed with sorrow.

"It is kind of you to say so," he murmured. "Actors are so terribly jealous of each other these days. Well, I must be going. The little fellow whose wife was stolen will be back to the three-room flat with the tin box by this time. He's a fine sprinter for his size. Oh, I've just thought of a new song:

"I stole the box, and along you came,
You stole it from me and I stole it again.
O-ho! He-ho!"

Again a vision of coal sliding down a scuttle was suggested to me as he sang.

"Am I to infer that you have again arrived at a conclusion, as in the case of your former selection?" I inquired humbly.

"You are."

"Which is?

"That you are going to call again soon at my three-room flat, to see if you cannot presume upon our friendship to extract from me the information which the tin box contains. That

is my conclusion which goes with my song."

"I believe you are a mind-reader, after all," I voiced admiringly. "So you consider me a friend?"

"Perhaps."

He was staring at my hand with those search-light orbs of his.

"Ah, that explains it," he said softly, as if communing with himself.

"Explains what?"

"Why, you now have the ring on your finger. While you were in that crowd a minute ago, I was very much disappointed on going through your various pockets not to be able to get my fingers on it. Some swift side-stepping there, Cliff, old boy. Good night."

As I stood watching him in open admiration as he hurried back down Broadway, whistling the crazy air of his little ditty at the top of his lungs, there was no answering joy in my heart for song. But, like him, I had also come to a conclusion, which I murmured sorrowfully to myself. It was this:

"Any mortal who judges your brains by your idiotic music is doomed to a sad awakening sooner or later—mostly sooner."

CHAPTER X.

THE BONELESS MAN.

With such a remarkably resourceful rascal as Mr. Gimlet-eyes to deal with, it behooved me to get this much-sought-after ring in a safer place than about my person. The next thing I realized he would be working some original scheme to slip it from my finger without my knowing I had lost it.

The respect I had felt for him an hour ago had increased a hundredfold. After being robbed of the tin box in this brazen way, I didn't doubt for a minute that I would soon be bereft of the ring if I did not soon dispose of it somewhere.

I boarded an up-town surface car, determined to place the ring in the hotel safe for the time being; then I would journey back to Max Leidner's house and see if Doris Armont needed my services. In those few short blocks, as I sat in the car, I speculated with a consuming curiosity upon the various phases of this riddle of the ring.

I stared in fascination at the odd gold band encircling my finger. What a strange history it must possess—and Doris had hidden it away since she was seven years old, and yet knew nothing about it!

But of its importance there could be no doubt. George Armont had shadowed its owner all the way from Berlin to secure it; and here in New York appeared his clever sister, Kronholtz and his man, and Gimlet-eyes and his two allies—all completely absorbed in the ruby-incrusted ring, and going through a variety of unheard-of maneuvers to possess it.

The chances my late partner in crime had taken to secure the tin box proved just how imperative this affair of the ring was to him. Who was he? What could he possibly gain by its possession? He was no ordinary gentleman of the highway, that was certain. I believed him when he said that he was merely "acting the thief," like myself.

With no solution to all my self-propounded queries, I alighted from the car at Forty-Second Street, at least happy in the thought that the resourceful person who had robbed me of the tin box had not also taken the ring. In five minutes I emerged from the hotel, having witnessed the cashier stow the precious ornament in the safe along with other valuables. And I breathed a great sigh of relief.

In another minute I was in a taxicab, gliding swiftly toward the residence on Madison Avenue. This brought back to my mind all those strange mysteries connected with the house of sorcery which the pursuit of the ring had relegated to the background for the last two hours.

I thought of the inexplicable plight of the girl to whom I had this day been betrothed—of the extraordinary influence the laughable, bent-boned Leidner exercised over her—of our strange marriage agreement—of the odd happenings in that house on Seventy-Second Street—of my friend Jim Bradworth's unaccountable connection with the affairs of Leidner.

When I came to that I had to take myself firmly in hand and deliberately shut the matter from my mind, for if I again commenced revolving the riddle of "Who is Jim Bradworth, if he is not himself?" this taxicab would surely land me in the insane ward of Bellevue Hospital instead of Max Leidner's home.

As if all this jumble of mysteries was not enough, I had now been confronted with the riddle of the ring.

Good Heavens—did any mortal ever tumble into such a brain-baffling mix-up all in one short day! And some folks contend that life in a big city like New York is prosaic, humdrum, uneventful!

With a "What's going to hit me next?" air, I walked up the steps of the Madison Avenue house, after dismissing the taxicab. I felt reasonably sure that Doris had not retired for the night; she would be waiting for me, as I had promised over the telephone to rejoin her.

I opened the door with my key. All was quiet. The gas chandelier was burning low in the hall. The front room was dark, but a stream of light in the rear room penetrated from between the faded red portières, which were now drawn back across the connecting doorway. So I closed the hall-door behind me softly, and tiptoed into that front room.

An astounding sight met my astonished eyes.

The rear room was lighted by a red-shaded lamp, which stood upon a small round mahogany table. The place was even more scantily furnished than the room in which I stood.

Two armchairs, an old-fashioned high-backed settee, and a tattered rug here and there—that was all. But seated on the settee was the most outlandish-looking creature I ever saw—excepting Max Leidner.

He appeared like an East Indian, judging by the color of his skin, and a slight facial resemblance to that nationality—but there the similarity ended.

The man was clothed only in a loincloth and a flowing white robe, embroidered with some Oriental material, which fell loosely from his shoulders to the floor. It was caught about his neck by a silken cord. The garment had no sleeves — merely armholes— through these his bare arms hung.

And such arms! They dangled limply at his sides, seemingly boneless; but even while I watched he moved them and they twisted this way and that, with a sinuous, gliding motion like two snakes! His bare limbs also protruded from the folds of the white robe. And they were twined limply about each other like pieces of string!

His body moved while I was observing this, and it was just as sinuous as his arms and legs. His neck oscillated from side to side. But his face was even more remarkable. The swarthy, sharp features were repellent and brutal; and with every expression his whole countenance responded — his nose, chin, and cheeks moving with the suppleness of a piece of rubber.

The man was apparently absolutely boneless!

It was the same specter whose ghostlike appearance as he flung up the stairs while I was talking to Max Leidner a few hours ago had momentarily deprived me of the power of speech.

But even more startling to me than the mere sight of this creature was what I had observed in the first comprehensive glance.

Sitting beside this unearthly creature, her beautiful head resting on his shoulder, weeping, while low sobs struck my ears—was Doris Armont!

After the first shock this astounding tableau administered to me had partly

subsided, a great wave of passion seized me. Here was this surpassingly beautiful girl—my *fiancée*—resting her head upon the shoulder of a creature neither man nor beast, and sobbing her heart out to him!

I don't know just what restrained me from leaping into that room and strangling him, so infuriated was I with blind, overwhelming jealousy! It was the first warning I had had of just how dear that girl had already become to me in a few short hours' acquaintance.

Restrain myself I did, however, half paralyzed, I judge, by the fascination of this weird spectacle.

In a few moments her sobs ceased, and, still resting her head upon his shoulder, she looked up into his beast-like face with glistening eyes, both love and pity unmistakably expressed on her perfect features! Then she began speaking in a low tone, but I could not catch her words.

Ever and anon the repulsive thing beside her either nodded or shook his head in response, with a quick, snappy motion as if his neck operated on springs. Evidently he had no power of speech.

He only stared straight ahead of him, with his sharp, glistening black eyes. At last Doris Armont raised her glorious head from his shoulder, and the creature prepared to rise.

His legs, twisted round each other, freed themselves like two reptiles uncoiling together. Slowly his sinuous body straightened, and he rose up on those extraordinary limbs. When he stood erect he was over six feet in height.

For a long moment he remained thus, surveying the girl, while she met his glance with that same look of mingled love and pity. Then he turned swiftly, as easily as a top spins round, and passed to the hall door with great strides.

Yet the movements of his limbs could not be called strides, either. It was a different walk than that possessed by any living man or beast. The knees did not bend, neither did the heel first leave the floor before the toes. The only thing I can accurately compare his legs to is the gliding, curved body of a reptile passing along the ground—with the difference that they were perpendicular.

Each limb curved backward and forward several times with every step, instantly straightening as soon as the foot touched the floor, to again curve and twist with the succeeding step. As soon as the sole of the foot came in contact with the floor it sprang away again like a rubber ball, causing the creature's body to move forward with astounding ease and smoothness.

He disappeared in the hall without a sound, and almost instantly I spied him passing the door of the darkened room in which I stood. In another instant he had bounded up the stairway three or four steps at a time, without the slightest sound, his flying white robe trailing behind, giving him the appearance of an apparition. I was convinced then and there that he could have cleared the whole stairway just as easily in one bound.

As I stood staring after that specter a queer feeling came over me that I had gazed upon an inhabitant of some other planet. The creature certainly possessed physical powers that no mortal ever did. What was it? Where had it come from?

Then I recalled that it seemed to understand the girl's words; so, dazed and stupefied, I glanced in the other room again.

Doris was sitting staring before her, body bent forward, hands clasped, a look of utter misery upon her face. I remembered those tears she had shed while sobbing on that being's shoulder; the look of pity—yes, even love—upon her features!

And all for such a beast! The thought was too much. I strode forward from the darkness of that room and stood framed in the doorway between the red portières.

She looked up, startled, and stared at me, her big brown eyes wide with fright.

"Oh—it is—you!"

"Yes," I said, rather curtly, I must admit. I strode forward into the room and stood over her, my accusing eyes fixing hers sternly.

"Wh-when did you arrive?" she stammered.

"In time to see the—performance," I retorted dryly.

"You saw him?"

"Yes — saw you weeping on his shoulder. Have you anything—er—to say?" I queried coldly.

She stared past me, her fingers twisting nervously, her face perplexed and troubled. Then she arose and stood looking straight into my eyes.

"I'm sorry you witnessed—this," she began, her voice shaken. "You cannot possibly comprehend the situation, and I—dare not tell you."

"Why?"

"Max Leidner has forbidden me."

"Have I not some rights, as your *fiancé*, to be enlightened a little as to your conduct with this — er — man, beast, or whatever it is?" I asked, utterly exasperated.

"Oh, Cliff," she implored, calling me by my surname for the first time, as she looked at me pitifully with beseeching eyes, "I don't know what to say—what to tell you without divulging the whole thing. And I cannot do that—must not —no, no!"

"How many matters are there which transpire in this house of which you dare not speak?" I asked, beginning to lose my temper. "I should think this affair between you and Leidner is sufficient."

"And this is that same matter," her words came quietly.

"What?" I ejaculated, dumfounded.

"Yes—about this man you saw here a moment ago revolves the whole affair between Leidner and myself."

"Good Heavens!" I gasped, and sank into a chair, staring at her in utter bewilderment. "You are willing to marry me—a stranger—or any one else Leidner might have chosen, because of that—that creature?"

"Not—not exactly on his account," the girl answered, looking entirely miserable. "Oh, Cliff, I wish I could tell you all—all! But I cannot—my lips are sealed.

"Please—please won't you have faith in me—won't you believe in me and try to bear all this in patience and fortitude? You will know all as soon as we are married. I'd give my right arm to tell you!

"I know exactly what a monstrous thing the whole affair must appear to you. Oh—I'm so sorry Leidner ever selected you—for your sake!"

She turned and sank prostrate on the settee with a stifled sob and buried her face in the pillows.

My jealous anger and suspicions vanished as if they never had found lodgment in my being. I fell on my knees by the settee, and put my arm about her shaking shoulders, and caressed her hair soothingly with my hand.

"Doris—my Doris," I whispered entreatingly. "Please don't! Forgive me for hurting you. I'm a brute! You have more to bear now without me making you miserable. I have faith in you for anything. No matter what may happen from now on I swear I will not mistrust you again. Please don't cry! Say you forgive me, won't you, dear?"

Quickly her sobbing ceased. She lifted her head from the pillows and sat erect.

Her arms stretched toward me and she took my head between her dear hands and gazed into my eyes with her own brimming with unshed tears!

A contented smile came over her glorious features. Slowly her head bent toward me, and she pressed her warm red lips to mine in a long, lingering kiss which sent the blood rioting through my veins!

"Forgive you?" she whispered ecstatically. "Dearest, it is I that must beg your forgiveness. You are wonderful—wonderful! No man ever did for a woman what you are doing for me! Oh, I'm so happy now — so happy!"

"Why, dear?"

"Because I realize now that you love me—for myself alone." She buried her head on my shoulder, her warm cheek pressed close to mine.

For a long minute we remained thus. I could have stayed in that delicious position for hours—but there was work to do. Gently I raised her head and kissed her for the first time full on those red lips. Then I rose and seated myself beside her.

"Let's not discuss this—this matter any more," I said. "Assume that it never happened—that I never saw it. I want to tell you about your ring."

"Oh, yes—the ring!"

She snuggled close in my arms, and in the intoxication of her body against mine I forgot for the time that only a few minutes before she had been sitting in this very place with her head upon that unearthly beast's shoulder.

I recounted briefly all the salient points in the pursuit of the ring. When I finished she sat lost in wondering thought for several minutes.

"I do not understand—it is a complete mystery to me."

"Yes—to me also," I replied. "But it will not be a mystery much longer. I have a plan whereby I think I can extract some information from this woman whose name also is Doris Armont. If not, I think that Mr. Gimlet-Eyes can enlighten me. Have you any relative bearing the same name as yourself?"

"No," she answered, puzzled. "Not to my knowledge."

I rose at last, and she accompanied me to the door.

"I'll see you early in the morning," I said. "Guess I'll be pretty busy the rest of the night, by the appearance of things. Good night, Doris!"

CHAPTER XI.

DORIS ARMONT NO. 2.

PEREMPTORILY dismissing from my mind for the present all thoughts of the strange episode of the boneless being I had just encountered in the house of sorcery, I hurried westward through the side street toward Broadway, passing the point where at five o'clock that afternoon I had greeted my friend Jim Bradworth.

Somewhere a bell was chiming the hour of midnight.

I had evolved a plan for again meeting Doris Armont No. 2, and endeavoring by a little subterfuge to extract from her the riddle of the ring.

I had remembered her brother's warning over the telephone to Kronholtz respecting the two friends who were shadowing him; also evidently interested in the ring. And after my experience with Mr. Gimlet-Eyes' two men, it somehow struck me forcibly that they were the individuals in question.

In my contemplated interview with the girl, it was my plan to pose as the agent for these parties. I would tell her that they had employed me to secure the ring, without enlightening me in the least concerning its history. And now, after successfully accomplishing my mission, I had led them to believe that I had not yet secured it.

My reason for this, I would tell her, was that I had been convinced of its importance to so many people, and therefore considered my services worth more than they were paying me.

Consequently, if she could show me where it was worth my while to play the game with her, she could have the ring.

It was a long shot—but there was just a bare possibility that it might score a bull's-eye. I had been taking such ticklish chances all my life, and I rather relished the prospects this adventure opened up to my imagination.

Before my theatrical career had made of me an eminently respectable individual in the eyes of society, I had led an existence which, though not criminal, was nothing to brag about.

Suffice it to say that necessity had long ago sharpened my wits and taught me how to employ my humble talents to

the best possible advantage in a pinch, and I had been in several such.

So I entered a telephone booth in a Broadway drug-store and called the girl's number. I was certain that she would not have yet retired. There would be little sleep in apartment No. 12 this night.

And then came the "Hello" in that feminine voice I had learned so well.

"Hello," I replied. "This is the party who left you some time ago in the Willington Hotel. I am anxious to meet you concerning that ring."

"Yes—why—where?" came her bewildered voice.

"At the Willington again. You must not inform any one. The matter is confidential between us. Where is your brother?"

"He is with Kronholtz somewhere, looking—"

"Yes; I understand. Can you meet me at once?"

"Yes," came her eager response.

"Good. You will not be sorry. I'll be waiting at the entrance of the Willington for you. Please hurry."

"I'll be there in ten minutes," she replied promptly.

"Very well. Good-by."

I hung up the receiver and walked toward the Willington, very much elated with the success of my little scheme thus far. I entered the hotel and arranged for a private dining-room. Then I took my station at the street entrance and waited.

I had not long to wait. A taxicab drew to the curb, coming from the south.

The chauffeur alighted, held open the door, and the girl with the orange plume in her hat stepped quickly to the sidewalk and advanced toward me, smiling with those uncommon eyes of hers.

"Rather an unusual hour to make an appointment," I answered her smile, doffing my hat; "but the matter is imperative."

"Yes, I understand," she responded in her musical tones. "I see you are quite—er—sober now."

She was glancing at me roguishly out of the corner of her eye.

"Quite," I retorted laughingly as I conducted her inside. "I have arranged for a private dining-room where we can talk without interruption."

She nodded her head. An attendant conducted us up-stairs to a cozy little room and left us there to summon a waiter.

The girl was quite at ease. She placed on the table the gold mesh-bag which I knew so well and surveyed herself in an immense gilt-framed mirror, dabbing at her hair, as women will.

"Will you have supper, or do you only care to refresh yourself with some champagne while we talk?" I asked.

"Just champagne, thank you," she smiled back through the mirror.

The waiter appeared, and I ordered. We seated ourselves at opposite sides of the square table set for two, and she surveyed me appraisingly—with a certain frank admiration in her changeable eyes.

"Will you please imitate my voice?" she said at last *à propos* of nothing.

I obliged promptly by saying in her exact tones: "I'll hold him till you arrive—the drunken fool!"

She gasped.

"Well, I'm convinced now," she said.

"Of what?"

"When Kronholtz and my brother told me how you had fooled them over the phone I told them very plainly just what idiots they were. But they weren't. I was."

The waiter returned with the liquid refreshment, served two glasses, and retired, closing the door.

"Now we can talk undisturbed," I said. "Here's to a better acquaintance."

She touched her glass to mine playfully, and laughingly added: "Here's hoping your wife does not telephone you before we are through."

"No; there will be no telephoning this trip," I assured.

"And, not satisfied with the ring, you had to steal the tin box, too," she said, shaking her head approvingly.

"Oh, so you discovered its loss?"

"Yes; my brother did. I asked him to describe the two detectives. And one of them was the 'drunken fool' whom I knew—alas! to my sorrow."

"How did your brother get back so quickly to the apartment?" I asked curiously. "I figured I would have at least an hour to search."

"Why, Kronholtz's man quickly lost patience waiting at the Garford and came back to the writing-room downstairs to see why I couldn't get rid of you. The carriage attendant on the sidewalk had observed you walk down Broadway, so we spent half an hour in a wild-goose chase.

"Meanwhile my brother at the St. Claire also became impatient and came here looking for me. Not finding any one, he started back for the house, having a suspicion that something was wrong."

"Must have been some excitement when you all got together and compared notes," I hinted.

"Rather. Kronholtz's man and myself came back to the writing-room in a vain hope of meeting you. Even then I was not sure that I had been tricked.

"I thought you might have gone in search of a few more drinks. Intoxicated persons are so erratic, you know. But you were still missing.

"Then I reluctantly realized I had been outrageously fooled. I telephoned my brother, who had returned to the apartment by that time. He came here at once.

"Meanwhile we phoned Kronholtz, who also joined us. I guess I heard some choice language from those two after we all told our little stories. My! but men can loose their language on occasions.

"When my brother described you as one of the detectives I suggested that he go back to the apartment and look for the tin box.

"We all returned together, and if you had been there then murder would surely have been done this night. It was pretty work—very pretty," she concluded, sipping her wine, her expressive eyes alight with wondering admiration. And she was very cool and unconcerned withal.

"How did you learn about the red carnation?" she asked at last.

"Oh, I was employed by certain people to watch you folks," I replied easily, putting emphasis on the "certain." "Happened to be hanging round the hall when No. 12 appeared on the switchboard. The hall-boy was upstairs with the elevator, so I obliged. Thus I got your brother's instructions to Kronholtz."

"Well, we figured it out that way," she said, "but couldn't realize just how it was accomplished. The elevator-boy swore he hadn't answered the call, and we at once suspected him of being mixed up in it somehow. It is all plain now, though."

"Very simple," I supplemented.

"No—it was the most complicated sleight-of-hand I ever participated in," she affirmed with a positive shake of her head. "And that impersonation of the inebriated gentleman was quite the most convincing acting that any one ever performed. You would certainly have made a wonderful actor," she volunteered frankly.

"Do you think so?" I asked innocently.

"I can't place you among the notorious gentlemen of fortune," she continued, a little perplexed frown on her forehead. "What name do the—er—authorities know you by?"

"They've never got close enough to me to know me by any name," I lied easily. "My—er—little exploits are generally executed in such a way that some other poor devil receives the honors from the police."

"Ah, I can readily believe that!" she rejoined, laughing merrily.

Again she fell to sipping at her glass, her wonderful eyes meanwhile study-

ing my face with a certain impudent frankness which showed to me an unusually clever mind in back of them. In this unusual situation, knowing how I had come into possession of the ring and tin box which was so all important to her, she was seemingly as indifferent and unconcerned as any young lady merely enjoying an after-theater supper with her escort.

Any other woman could not have thus long contained her curiosity, but would have immediately inquired as to the object of this meeting. And yet I knew that her natural feminine instinct to be enlightened was consuming her.

"Now that we understand each other better," I smiled, "I'll explain my reason for wishing to see you."

She nodded her head, and, producing a gold cigarette-case from her bag, selected one of its dainty little contents. I furnished a light, and, with a "Thank you," she placed it to her lips with a practised hand and raised her arching eyebrows a trifle as a signal for me to proceed.

"As I stated before," I continued, "certain parties employed me to watch you and your brother, with the object of securing the ring."

"Yes, I know them—Cutler and Warnham," she nodded.

"Yes—Cutler and Warnham," I confirmed, glad to get this important information so easily.

"And who is this other party who played detective with you?" she queried.

"Oh, I secured him to help me," I lied glibly. "An old confederate of mine who works well in harness with me."

"He does," she assented with a convincing nod of her head.

"Well, Cutler and Warnham left me absolutely in the dark as to why they wanted the ring and tin box. All I knew was that it was up to me to get them. But after getting into the game and seeing all the complicated maneuvers its transfer entailed it struck me that my services in the matter were worth far more than even the large commission they promised me."

"They probably are," she said encouragingly, watching me with momentarily increasing interest.

"Well," I drawled, puffing on my own cigarette and leaning a little forward as I looked her straight in the eyes, "I'm open to any proposition you care to make me for that ring and tin box. But it must be a good one."

She took several meditative puffs, never losing my glance for a moment. Her face was impassive, but her eyes shot forth a myriad of expressions, seeming to change color chameleonlike with each photographed thought of their owner.

At last she deftly flicked the ash with her dainty little finger and said quietly:

"If I was sure of you, I could name you a reward which would beat anything you ever obtained for any of your no doubt numerous clever exploits."

"It would have to go some," I repiled. "But what proof do you want that I am playing fair with you?"

"I—don't—know," she hesitated. "This is a big game—a very big game. You haven't the faintest conception just how big it is. I must be cautious."

"Evidently your game is dead, though, without possession of the ring," I hazarded.

"It is," she agreed frankly.

"What's the answer, then?" I asked indifferently. "I've got the ring. You want it, and I'm willing to let you have it—for a price. I'm perfectly fair with you. There is no sentiment in this thing with me. A matter of business—pure and simple."

Again she puffed meditatively for a full minute, her lightning brain appraising me shrewdly with the assistance of those two unusual eyes.

"Do you know," she began at last smilingly, leaning over the table toward me, "I've taken a great liking to you? I admire any one who can fool me. You're the first man I've ever been

able to admire that way—for you're the first who ever fooled me."

"Thank you," I murmured.

"You speak of your price," came her musical tones softly. "I could name you a price that would astound you. But the reward I have in mind to offer is even better than that. But it will require you to live a lie for the rest of your life—to bury your identity in that of another.

"And yet it is easy—and the reward is princely. For such a stake do you think you would be willing to live such a lie?" she finished, staring at me intently, her eyes alight with the gravity of that which was in her mind.

"I would," I answered without a moment's hesitation. "Life is one big game of poker to me. I'll play my hand as you want me to if you'll let me sit in this game—and deal fair."

"I'll deal fair," she responded, her breath coming quickly, her mobile features expressive of a supreme delight at my answer. "I knew you'd play," she added happily. "And when I get through talking you'll bless your lucky stars that you decided to see me before turning over that ring. And now I'm going to tell you the whole story. You and I will work together on this thing—share and share alike."

"Let her go," I encouraged, leaning back comfortably in my chair to listen.

CHAPTER XII.

I SOLVE THE RING RIDDLE.

"But first—have you really got that ring?" asked my companion cautiously. "You didn't turn it over to Cutler or Warnham?"

"If you'll wait here about fifteen minutes, I'll go and get it," I volunteered.

"Never mind; I believe you. Let me see—it is a long story, and I might as well begin at the beginning. In the first place, my name is not Doris Armont, and neither is the other party my brother."

"Really!" I exclaimed, with quite a little genuine surprise.

"What our real names are is immaterial just now. Suffice it to say that this ring is the property of a girl named Doris Armont, who is about my own age. She has owned it since she was a mere child, without realizing its history or its value.

"By chance this man who passes as my brother became mixed up in the affair in this way: He has done certain work of a more or less shady nature for a man who stands high in affairs of state in Germany. His name is Count Stalheim. A month ago my partner, George Armont — as we will call him for convenience—while in Berlin, was introduced by Count Stalheim to the affair of the ring. And the story the count told him was this:

"Prince Ferdinand Helfonstein, the last of a long line of princes of the House of Helfonstein, had visited America some twenty-seven odd years ago, while yet a young man. He was traveling incognito.

"He met a very beautiful and accomplished young widow in Detroit, fell desperately in love with her, like a true scion of his royal race, and married her. He disclosed to her his identity, of course, but assured her that he could overcome all family objections to his alliance with one who was not of royal blood, as he was the younger son and his brother had therefore fallen heir to the castle and estates, and also the title of Prince of Helfonstein upon his father's death two years before.

"But it so happened that he received a cable shortly after his honeymoon, just as he was planning to take his American bride back home. And the despatch informed him that his brother had been thrown from a horse, instantly killed—and thus he was now the reigning prince of the House of Helfonstein.

"Well, Prince Ferdinand, head of the House of Helfonstein as he now was, realized that his marriage to his bride would never be countenanced,

and that it would mean the losing of all the family inheritance—everything. He would be an outcast.

"He went back home to assume his duties, promising his wife that he would endeavor to influence the powers that be to look favorably upon his marriage. And meanwhile his wife waited and waited, but the reports he sent her were entirely discouraging.

"A daughter was born of this marriage, and shortly after the mother died, evidently of a broken heart. She realized that her husband had practically deserted her. She had moved to another city after Prince Ferdinand departed, assumed the name of her first husband, and so the child of the prince was known as—"

"Doris Armont," I murmured like one in a dream.

Everything about me was swimming hazily before my eyes; my own voice sounded very strange and distant to my ears.

"Yes—how did you know?" asked the woman before me, with a start.

"Oh," I said, pulling myself together with a tremendous effort, "I just surmised it."

"Yes—of course," she assented. "That ring was given to Ferdinand by his father upon his death-bed. He was his favorite son. The ring had been handed down from father to son for generations; it bears the coat of arms of the ancient House of Helfonstein—a shield with a lion's head and a mailed fist. And Ferdinand, on leaving for Germany, gave it to his bride as a token and a promise that he would return to claim her.

"Of course he could not gain the consent of the ruling powers to recognize this morganatic marriage, as it was considered. And then he heard of his wife's death. He was filled with remorse—he was never the same man from that day until his death, two months ago. He never would consent to marry various women of royal blood who were selected for him, and so died, a broken-hearted man."

I muttered some vague words under my breath, hardly able to follow this astounding recital.

"Pardon me?" inquired my *vis-à-vis*.

"Nothing at all," I hastened to say. "Please proceed."

"His was a rather odd death, which has never been fully explained. In fact, it was a murder. Attendants, hearing a pistol-shot, rushed into his apartments in his castle outside a small German village and witnessed a most peculiar spectacle.

"Prince Ferdinand stood with a smoking revolver in his hand. But some unheard-of thing had happened to him. His body was all bent and deformed, as if some giant had taken and crushed it, leaving the bones all misshapen—twisted in all sorts of grotesque shapes as no human bones were ever meant to be."

I articulated some unintelligible thing aloud with a hoarse gasp and half rose from my chair, only to fall back, weak and inert. I was thinking of Max Leidner—it was his description!

"Go on—go on!" I uttered weakly to the girl. "Such things exercise my imagination—I am so susceptible," I added, in explanation of my overwhelming astonishment.

"The attendants hardly recognized their master, so transformed and ugly was his poor broken body. Prince Ferdinand pointed to something on the floor and waved them out of the room frantically.

"'Go,' he commanded, 'or you will meet my fate!'

"They tumbled out, and he followed them. And in the presence of some of his guests he told as best he could what awful calamity had overtaken him.

"It appears that when a young man, before his visit to America, there had lived on this estate a poor peasant woman with a son who had been terribly deformed since birth. The unfortunate was in his early twenties at

that time, and it appears that one day while Prince Ferdinand was riding past the peasant's cottage, he saw this youth, all bent and deformed, in the doorway.

"The prince spoke to him, and when the young man answered his jaw wabbled in such a crazy way that it moved Ferdinand to laughter. The boy was so enraged that he hurled some vile names at him, and so incensed was the prince that he had him and his mother driven from the village.

"No more was seen or heard of him till, on this night two months ago, his misshapen form appeared outside one of the open windows in the room where Prince Ferdinand sat quietly smoking.

"'Ha! Prince Ferdinand!' he called through the window. 'Thirty years ago you laughed at me! He who laughs last laughs best!'

"And with that he threw something into the room which he had concealed under a long black cloak.

"It was an immense black cat, all twisted and deformed like himself. The beast came wabbling on its twisted legs toward the prince where he had arisen from his chair.

"At the unearthly spectacle of this monstrous creature he backed away toward the wall, but the cat still followed him, its yellow eyes seeming to glare hypnotically. And as the prince leaned against the wall, paralyzed with fright, it advanced and rubbed its unsightly body against his limbs.

"And then Prince Ferdinand said a strange feeling swept over him—like some mad fever racing through his veins. Every bone in his body seemed to melt into liquid. He sprang away from that frightful beast and, pulling a revolver he always carried, shot it.

"Before the smoke cleared away his bones seemed to harden again. He said he could feel it—just as if a thousand darts of hard steel had shot through his body.

"Even as he stood there staring at the dead cat his bones hardened instantly, permanently, and left his body all twisted and broken in that posture. So this was the astounding tale he told to those about him."

My body was leaning far across the table, my mouth agape, my ears drinking in every word of her recital, which was given in a dramatic tone and with expressive gestures of her supple hands which would have done credit to any actress. For my part, I had forgotten myself entirely — too dumfounded to act myself or attempt to play the rôle I had assumed with her.

I was jolted clean out of my senses for the moment. Again I saw myself in that house of sorcery, a glass cage suspended from the ceiling, while the black cat, all twisted and malformed, glared at me with its yellow eyes.

"Interesting, is it not?" she said, taking a true story-teller's pride in the impression she had made.

"Yes—very interesting," I whispered, my lips and tongue dry and parched.

"It is a long tale, you see," she said, half apologetically. "But I must tell it fully so that you will understand this little game of the ring."

"Yes—of course. Omit nothing, please. I'm deeply interested, I assure you."

If she only knew just what reasons I had for being interested!

"Well, after a while they screwed up courage to go into the room and look at the dead cat. It was dissected and examined by scientists and medical experts, but they were all left hopelessly at sea. The animal's flesh was apparently as normal and healthy as any other feline.

"Only its bones were unusual. They were brown—almost black—and twisted in all sorts of weird shapes. And they were as hard as chilled steel. Apparently death rid the brute of all power to communicate the unheard-of disease to any living thing.

"No sign of the perpetrator of the ghastly deed could be found anywhere. He had vanished as if the darkness of

that fateful April night had swallowed him up.

"As for Prince Ferdinand, the horrors of that night made of him a gibbering lunatic. His plight was pitiful. He was continually crying out: 'The cat—the cat! Take it away!' But at last merciful death ended his misery.

"Now we come to the real story in which you and I are interested. This Count Stalheim I mentioned, for whom George Armont had rendered certain services, told him what I have told you.

"Oh, yes—I forgot to mention that Prince Ferdinand, for many years before his death, had spent immense sums of money in hiring private detectives to search the world for his daughter, whose name is Doris Armont. The prince was filled with remorse for the manner in which he had deserted his bride years ago, and wanted to atone as much as possible by finding his daughter and settling a fortune upon her.

"But it seems that the first husband of the deserted bride had left a fortune, as well as a son, who was called George Armont. So Doris and her half-brother had ample money, with which they traveled in all parts of the world. Several times the prince's emissaries obtained slight clues of the girl's whereabouts, but they were never able to locate her.

"But at last, a little over a month ago, after Ferdinand's death, this Count Stalheim, who was an enemy of the prince, heard that the girl was in Berlin, *en route* to America.

"He was familiar with every detail of the story, as he had some trusted attendants in the prince's household who kept him closely informed—and, as luck would have it, this supposed brother of mine was executing a commission for the count at the time.

"He was the very man he required for his scheme. So it was not long before my partner located the missing heiress in a Berlin hotel, where she was stopping, totally ignorant of the fact that her unknown father had died in his castle, only a few miles away from the German metropolis.

"But this was not all the count had learned. He also had agents tracing the girl for years, in hopes of discovering something in connection with the prince's secret marriage which would not prove creditable. And he learned that which Prince Ferdinand's agents were unable to uncover.

"It appears that his American bride had really been the young daughter of a prince whose family is directly related to the reigning house of Austria. She eloped secretly with an American millionaire named Armont, and so incensed was her father that he gave out the report that she had died while traveling in the United States. And from that day to this the report was never questioned, and she never came forward to establish her identity—not even informing her second husband, Prince Ferdinand, that she was of royal blood.

"She was proud; and when the prince chose between her and his title to reign over the House of Helfonstein, she never enlightened him. Therefore the marriage was not morganatic, after all; and if she had declared herself, she could have taken her place beside her husband.

"What other reasons she might have had for keeping her identity hidden from Prince Ferdinand I do not know.

"Doris Armont is of royal blood on both sides, however; and her claim to the fortune and estates of the dead prince cannot be disputed. She is the sole survivor and lawful heir of the ancient House of Helfonstein. So now you can probably see the drift of this little affair of the ring."

"Yes—of course—yes," I murmured in a daze, while the fact kept pounding in on my brain in a dull, monotonous iteration: "You found your dream-girl—only to lose her again."

But my companion's low, even tones again recalled me.

"And then Count Stalheim laid bare to my confederate his clever scheme: he was to shadow her night and day, and secure the monogrammed ring which Ferdinand had given the girl's mother over twenty-five years ago.

"Years ago the detectives the prince had hired learned that an old nurse had been entrusted with the ring by the mother, to give to the girl when she was old enough to understand. The nurse died very suddenly, but it was reasonable to suppose that she had given the child the ring before she died.

"As the girl had not come forward and established her identity, or communicated with her father in any way, it was also reasonable to suppose that the nurse had not been able to tell her the secret of the ring before her sudden death. These facts Count Stalheim ascertained from his spies in the prince's household.

"So it was really simple, after all. My partner was to secure the ring, and then he was to pose as the half-brother, George Armont, and I was selected to impersonate the missing heiress, Doris Armont.

"He shadowed the girl to New York, and traced her to a house not far from here on Madison Avenue.

"Now, it so happens that my confederate was familiar with all the details of Prince Ferdinand's strange death, as he was in the vicinity of the castle at the time. There he talked to several old inhabitants of the near-by village, who remembered this odd, misshapen creature when he had lived there as a youth with his mother. And what was his astonishment, on shadowing this house in which the girl lived, to see her emerge from it one afternoon two days ago with the deformed man — the murderer of her own father!"

I gasped my simulated amazement as best I could. Of course, it was no news to me—but my informer could not appreciate that fact.

"Yes—no other," continued the girl before me, enjoying the shock she thought she had administered to me.

"My partner had heard each detail of this malformed creature's description so often from the villagers that he knew no other creature could possibly resemble him. And this fellow had that peculiar wabbling jaw, laughing at which caused the prince's tragic death years later.

"Well, we puzzled over this remarkable coincidence for many solid hours, and could not make head nor tail of it. But time was precious, so my confederate resolved on a desperate chance.

"He visited this man in his home a few hours ago—to be exact, about nine o'clock. He told him bluntly that he knew who he was, and that if he did not secure the ring from the girl and turn it over he would communicate with the German authorities and have him extradited. He was living there under the name of Max Leidner—an assumed name.

"The plan worked even better than we had dreamed possible. Leidner, as he now calls himself, left the room, and after a while returned with the ring. He evidently was unaware of who the girl really was, and seemed to know nothing at all about the article we wanted.

"What mysterious hold he has over Doris Armont—whom my confederate says is the most beautiful woman he ever saw—is something which I cannot explain. But we do not have to bother ourselves with that — it is an outside matter to us."

"Of course," I agreed, now having recovered somewhat of my wonted composure. But my companion did not know that it was anything but an "outside matter" to me.

Doris Armont—my *fiancée*—was of royal blood and the only living survivor of the House of Helfonstein! Yes; I had found her—only to lose her again! But I was forgetting my surroundings. I recalled myself with a start as the girl replaced her glass on the table after sipping it meditatively.

"And so he turned over the ring?" I queried.

"Yes; and by the questions Leidner asked we know that he is entirely ignorant of its history. Very few people even in the prince's immediate household knew of its existence; so it is therefore not strange that he also is in the dark.

"And the fact that he could induce the girl to part with it so readily bears out our conviction that she, also, is ignorant of its significance.

"So you see our work was not as hard as we anticipated. All we had to guard against were two men who for years had been employed in the service of Count Stalheim, and who had executed several transactions for him in conjunction with my partner in Germany at different times.

"They became dissatified, these two, and the count had reliable information that they had followed my partner to New York and were going to try to get a hand in this game of the ring if possible. I don't know whether you knew it before—but those men are your friends, Cutler and Warnham."

"No; I did not know," I answered truthfully for once. "I told you I knew nothing about this matter. I worked with Cutler years ago on a certain deal in New York. I ran into him accidentally only yesterday morning, and he arranged with me to go after this ring. What do they want with it, do you suppose?"

My curiosity was genuine. I was mighty anxious to know what Mr. Gimlet-Eyes—their employer—wanted with that ring.

"Oh, merely a case of blackmail," she responded readily. "With the ring in their possession, they can sell it to Count Stalheim at an enormous figure."

"I see," I said—and yet I felt that she was away off the true scent.

It did not strike me that the possessor of those search-light eyes—honest-appearing eyes—was merely in a petty little blackmailing scheme. His shrewd brain was after bigger fish than that.

"But what about the tin box I stole?" I queried with an interest I could barely conceal.

"That," she enlightened, "is very important to Messrs. Cutler and Warnham, your confederates. It contains all the correspondence George Armont has had with Count Stalheim concerning this ring.

"If your friends get hold of that, they can blackmail the count for any sum they choose to name. Such proof of the part he plays in the affair would, if published, ruin him completely—drive him from Germany, in fact."

"Um—I see," I said. "And I thought they were paying me well for my work. Now I can appreciate what a rotten deal they were giving me—and I did all the big work, too.

"But what has all this to do with the proposition you spoke of making me—living a lie for the rest of my life?" I queried, taking the bottle from its bed of ice and filling our glasses again.

She was lighting another cigarette.

"My proposition is simple," she replied, after a few meditative puffs. "You will impersonate George Armont, the half-brother of Doris Armont."

"But I thought your confederate had that job," I propounded, taken completely by surprise.

"Do you remember what you said before I commenced my story?" she asked. "You remarked that there was no sentiment in this matter with you—purely business."

"Um—I see. Meaning likewise that there is no sentiment in this matter with you?"

"Exactly. It suits my purpose to have you as a half-brother with whom to enjoy the princely fortune, the estates and castles which my poor murdered father, Prince Ferdinand, has left me."

She was smiling whimsically at me behind a blue wreath of smoke.

"Is it not worth living a lie the rest of your life—for this?"

"It is," I responded promptly.

"You are with me, then?" she breathed, throwing her cigarette on a plate and leaning far forward across the table, her olive skin flushed, her eyes flashing.

"I am," I said, and gave her my hand upon it.

"I knew you would!" she cried, laughing almost hysterically. "That's why I took a chance and let you in on the whole story. I knew a princely game such as this would appeal to you."

"But how are you going to side-track your partner?" I queried interestedly.

"You and I have the ring and the tin box, haven't we? That's all that is necessary—the ring will establish our identity. And Prince Stalheim will be perfectly willing to let you play the game.

"You are a born actor, and you can carry the part better than my present partner. I've been afraid he'd trip up, sooner or later. He's all right in his line. But this is a little bit over his head."

"Very nice," I assented. "But he's not going to be side-tracked without making considerable noise."

She smiled, a very cunning light in her changeable eyes, as she slowly sipped at her glass. Placing it on the table, she leaned toward me, and spoke in a low voice:

"A word from me to Kronholtz—who is Count Stalheim's confidential aid—and my old partner will—ahem—meet with a very sudden, unexpected—er—end.

"Kronholtz has several men with him who are adepts in getting undesirable people out of the way—permanently. That fellow you saw with me in the writing-room is one of them. Yes; it has got to be. It is the only way. Of course we could never be safe with him possessing our secret—you realize that?"

She was still smiling into my eyes—confidentially, frankly, as if she had proposed some harmless little trick to play on an acquaintance.

"Yes—of course—certainly," I rejoined. "It is the only way."

"Very well. That is settled," she said, as if dismissing a trivial detail from her mind. "I'm glad now that you appeared on the scene and stole the tin box and the ring. It has given me a half-brother who will play the game artistically, as it ought to be played."

Again she smiled at me, this time admiringly.

"But what about Cutler and Warnham? Even though they haven't got the evidence the tin box contains, it strikes me they can make things mussy."

"Oh," she enlightened, "Kronholtz's men will attend to them, too. Never fear; Kronholtz is a clever genius. He will look after everything."

"And where does Count Stalheim come in on this thing?"

"He gets a third—you and I the other two-thirds. Oh, there is enough for the three of us, I assure you."

"Very well. Is that all there is to it?"

"Yes; excepting that I will have to arrange a meeting for you with Kronholtz in the morning. We must not lose any time now. The sooner we get to Germany the sooner our reward."

"Oh—by the way," I said. "What about the real Doris Armont and her half-brother? If they go wandering about Europe on another trip some day they're apt to stumble into the thing at last. Then we'd be in a pretty pickle."

She looked at me almost reproachfully.

"Didn't I tell you Kronholtz would look after everything? They'll be swallowed up—disappear—just like the others."

"Oh," I said weakly; but she merely took it as an expression of my understanding of the little affair.

"The road will be clear when we start to claim my father's, poor Prince Ferdinand's, estate, money, and castles in Germany," she encouraged. "Don't worry on that score. It's all very simple.

"However, we'll have lots of time to discuss everything to-morrow. I must get back to apartment No. 12. My partner will be wondering what has happened to me—if he has returned.

"Let me see—I'll meet Kronholtz first thing in the morning, and arrange a meeting for you. It must be somewhere out of the track of everybody concerned. My partner must never suspect I am playing him double. I can arrange the meeting now. Let's say twelve o'clock noon, in the waiting-room of the station in Hoboken. I'll be there with Kronholtz at that time. Is that all right?"

"Fine," I said. "I'll be there without fail. Then we can go to some quiet place and talk it over in safety."

"Very well," she agreed, and arose.

"Let me go first. We must not be seen together," she cautioned. "No telling who we might run into."

"That's true," I assented, and advanced toward the door.

Before I reached it it suddenly flew open.

There stood the impersonator of George Armont, the man with the hang-dog countenance who had been sent to get the ring, and a burly, heavy-browed individual whom I rightly surmised to be Kronholtz.

They crowded into the room and closed the door.

George Armont was covering us with a revolver, while his shifty, close-set black eyes glanced savagely from me to the girl.

(To be continued.)

TO HIS WIFE.

By William Cullen Bryant.

HERE, where I sit alone, is sometimes heard,
From the great world, a whisper of my name,
Joined, haply, to some kind, commending word,
By those whose praise is fame.

And then, as if I thought thou still were nigh,
I turned me, half forgetting thou art dead,
To read the gentle gladness in thine eye
That once I might have read.

I turn, but see thee not; before my eyes
The image of a hillside mound appears,
Where all of thee that passed not to the skies
Was laid with bitter tears.

And I, whose thoughts go back to happier days,
That fled with thee, would gladly now resign
All that the world can give of fame and praise
For one sweet look of thine.

Thus, ever, when I read of generous deeds—
Such words as thou didst once delight to hear—
My heart is wrung with anguish, as it bleeds
To think thou art not near.

And now that I can talk no more with thee
Of ancient friends, and days too fair to last,
A bitterness blends with the memory
Of all that happy past.

The Gold Mill

by Raymond S. Spears

PETER MASKIN was dead and in his grave. The mill where he ground corn, and more than corn, was silent in the gully of the run. There was no one to lift the shunt-board and let the water pour down over the great overshot wheel. The corn that was in the toll-bin grew musty and sour where it lay heaped.

There was no one, so far as the countryside knew, who could claim the mill and thirty acres of land. The bullet that bored through the heart of Old Pete the Miller made joy where there had been suffering and dismay.

It seemed as if the man's bones had cast their blight, like salt, across the mill lot, for only rank weeds grew there, except at the entrance to the mill; there was hard, bare ground. It was easily believed that the bones did not rest.

The crowd that came to the man's funeral was large—not to increase the mourning, but to see with their own eyes that Old Pete had not been too mean to die, as some had said. If he had stood up in his coffin and demanded tolls, demanded interest money, demanded payments, there would have been fear, dread, horror, but no surprise.

The face was no grayer in death than it had been in life; across that countenance had spread the terrible disease of avarice.

He would have cursed the extravagance that took from his leather pocketbook the money for the coffin in which to inter his own remains. A box, made with his own hands from weather-old fence-boards had been good enough for his wife; he asked no better for himself. He had denied none more than he denied himself.

Now, when the wind blew at night, with Old Pete in that extravagant box of his—the box that had made the undertaker and the coroner grin with triumph—there came loud wails from the old mill; there came low howls, quavering yells, bellowings, and laughter. It was the laughter that made that road unpopular at night.

When the screams of the wind whirling through the mill were loudest one could see by moonlight pale figures come pouring out of the door between slams—figures that danced whirling over the bare place, killing all the things

that might have grown there, and then leaped up over the burdocks and were gone in a puff.

By day the snakes gathered on that bare ground in sunny weather and made trails across the dust of bran and corn.

It was a brave man who would go to that old mill and stand in the gloom, looking into the dusty recesses, curtained by the wavering cobwebs swung down from beams and frames.

Youths made passing the old mill the test of their courage. They reported green eyes in the dark of the mill. Every one knew that it was Old Pete the Miller's cat, but none knew whether the cat was alive or dead.

The cat had been Old Pete's wild companion—a lank, black hunter that never grew fat. The very rats in the mill were lean from dodging the angry miller and his no less angry cat. A mad she-cat, an old maid that had never littered kittens, helped make the place untenantable, no matter whether she was alive or dead.

There was yet the hoarded gold.

It was gold that had transformed the pretty, green water, Maskin's Run Gully, into the terrible mill site that it had become. Every one knew the story of that gold. It lured while it repelled.

When Peter Maskin was a young man he was like all the other young men of the land. He skylarked round, courted the girls, and even spent his money for moonshine. He used to go down the river on log rafts, and came home on the train and overland on the stage with the long coil of handyline rope over his shoulder with the rest of them.

One trip the Chattanooga sawmill paid him off in gold—paid him one hundred dollars in gold for his string of logs. He had never seen gold before; if the word was a part of his vocabulary none remembered ever hearing him use it; if he had ever hungered for gold not a man or woman in all the world knew it.

Now he stared at the coins, the five coins, and his companions saw growing in his eyes the terrible look which was never again to leave them—the look that spread across his countenance and stretched down into his hands and fingers, changing them into hooks that always pulled toward him.

Never a piece of gold did Peter Maskin spend! He doled out his pennies and his silver and eked out his toll of corn, but never did a gold coin slip past those hooked hands of his. If he loaned money he paid it over in silver and paper, and drew it back in gold.

"Pay me back in gold!" he would demand as he counted out his paper and his silver. Always he had paper and silver.

They paid for his coffin with paper and silver; they paid the coroner's fees, the sheriff's fees, everybody's fees, with silver and paper from the dead man's wallet.

There was one empty compartment to that cowhide wallet; when some one who was curious held the leather to the reflection of the sun it gave off the sheen of gold. They could not help but divine that Old Pete had never let his silver or his paper touch his gold or go into the receptacle of his gold.

"Where did he put his gold?" men asked one another.

None could answer. None dared to seek it.

"He took it with 'im!" tradition took to saying. Some believed that the kettles in which he was supposed to have buried it had gone into his grave to rattle among his bones.

In the depths of their hearts many a man wished that he could stumble upon that gold. Not one had his wish.

The man who found the gold had never heard of it, nor dreamed of having gold, and it fastened itself to him like the Old Man of the Sea.

His name was Doland Colb—a harmless man who spent most of his time playing the fiddle. He would rather feed his soul with music than feed his stomach with food or clothe his body with wool.

Shiftless, good-natured, care-free, he had never been drawn taut in all his born days. He shambled through the mountains, playing as he walked along. He would stop and play for a gray squirrel if the squirrel showed interest and appreciation; he charmed a whole drove of mules one day; foxes came a long ways behind him, doubtful of the man, but charmed by the inspired strains.

If a man invited him in to a snack, well and good; he was worthy of his hire, and he would play a family to sleep to show his appreciation. But if a dog howled he would take down his strings and loosen up his bow, rather than hurt even the feelings of a beast.

He bore no hard feelings against any man in all the world when he came over the divide and started down the trail of Maskin's Run.

Others called that the lonesomest trail in all the world, but not so Doland Colb. It inspired him; a storm was just coming on, and the far lightnings bellowed forth low thunderings which the fiddler set to music, and poured it back into the full sky, a part of the chorus and the play.

If the sky had its lightning, clouds, and thunder, the earth had its mountains, shadows, and Doland Colb—ragged, shaggy, and impassioned, pouring out his tunes like a bird.

His eyes were on the belching, black clouds of the sky, and he stepped high to avoid the boulders and cobbles of the road. He was awakened from his reveries by the loud and discordant splash of a huge rain-drop on his fiddle.

The splash stretched a string, and he looked about him in haste and dazed surprise, trying to place himself, wondering how he had come to be in such a place without shelter at such a time. Heretofore it had been a picture, but now he saw the gray, sheeting rain coming, and to save his precious strings he must find shelter.

Ahead of him loomed a mill, gray and solemn, with the water pouring out round the shunt-board and falling down in spray, wasted on all but an eye for neglect and beauty and fallow scenes. He swung into the old mill and sat down just inside the doorway to wait while the storm should drive by.

If his fiddle-strings had not been dampened by that one drop that splashed on the instrument he would have played on. As it was, he could only look at the rain. Then, growing restless, he began to look round him in the mill.

He saw what all the others had seen —cobwebs, dust, musty toll-bin and wheels and burrs that did not turn. He walked round and climbed up-stairs to look where the corn was shoveled into the hopper, and he gingerly brushed away the dust that was on webs across the little window there, trying to let in light in order to see better.

He knew the mountain mills, had listened while they turned over and over —"*calink—calank—calunk*" — and in the silence of this mill his mind reverted to those other mills. He remembered that each mill had its own sound—the undershot, the overshot, the turbine.

There in the quiet of this mill he could feel the music held in the planks, beams, and stones of all mills. He could hear the spirit of the mill singing; as he looked at the unground corn sprouting there, and as he thought of the green toll-bin, something of the calamity of the mill that was dead stirred in his soul.

His breath began to come in short gasps, thinking of what was unplayed —what no man had ever yet played. He listened, and amid the uproar of the storm, while the loose planks rattled and the wind drew screaming through the whistling places, he caught the rhythm of the old mill, and he knew that after a time he would play it on the fiddle and make it into music that would cheer him on his way.

Listening, he heard a chinking sound, followed by another and another. He looked around, puzzled and doubtful. He could not tell whether it was up-stairs or down.

When he stepped he heard a rippling of chinking. He stamped, and there was a splashing of metal somewhere. He looked down the steep stairs on which his tracks were printed in the dust as if he had stepped on snow.

On the floor, beside his fiddle, was a piece of gold, round and dull, but unmistakable.

He stared at it curiously, wondering, not quite comprehending at first, for when one has been a wandering minstrel during many, many years the heart does not at first bound with exultant greed when one sights the shift of wind that changes his fortune.

"Oh!" Doland Colb said half aloud. "That was the strange note that I heard!"

Then he descended, making his footprints in the dust upon each step that he had climbed. When he was downstairs he saw what had happened. His weight on the floor above had shaken the beams and timbers, and one supporting beam beside the burrs had sprung under the weight, and from its hollow heart had fallen a cascade of old gold, which Pete the Miller had accumulated in the years of his grasping and hungering and greed.

The fiddler did not stoop at once to pick it up. He was thinking of the sound that it had made, and he did not want to forget that.

Then he picked up the coin that he had seen first, where it had rolled through the dust, leaving a sharp black trail to its resting place beside the old fiddle. It was a contrast — that scarred fiddle and the piece of dull gold.

Colb picked it up; he picked up the other coins and put them in his pocket. Then he pulled out the wooden plugs which had served as a ladder up the beam from which the miller could reach the chute and the hopper of the mill. Each plug was driven into a two-inch auger hole. In each hole were pieces of gold. One of the plugs had shaken loose, and the coins had tumbled out.

The fiddler's pockets would not hold it all; they would have torn out if they had held it all. There were eight hundred double eagles, or fifty pounds troy. The fiddler looked about him, trying to find something, trying to think of something in which to carry that dead weight of sixteen thousand dollars net.

He was glad that the storm was lasting as long as it did. He wanted no company there at such a time.

As he gazed about his thoughts quickened, and his eyes gained in sharpness; his frame stiffened. From a thousand directions came pouring the avalanche of hopes deferred, of longings ungratified, of inspirations never voiced. He took out the coin he had first seen, and held it in his hand to compare it with his weather-beaten, wet-stringed fiddle; it was a contrast that he would never forget as long as he should live.

There was some heavy canvas on the mouth of the chute to guide the corn down into the hopper, and also to prevent the corn from overrunning the brim of the hopper. This canvas at last struck the eye of the man, and he pulled it down—a strip sixteen inches wide and three feet long.

It would lap itself round his slim waist, and he drew from under his coat a long needle and a black thread, the inevitable kit of a wandering minstrel and of those who travel to forget. With this needle and thread he made himself a canvas money-belt, whose compartments he loaded with gold.

He swung it round his waist, and over his shoulders he led strips of canvas to support the weight. When this was done he picked up the pegs and drove them into the holes in the upright timber again.

When he was all through a slim, black cat came purring up out of a hole in the corner and brushed round him, her eyes shining green in the dark of the mill.

The storm had ceased its downpour, but overhead the black clouds milled

and made ready to break away. Doland Colb, after a look at the weather, picked up his fiddle and his bow and stepped out on the hard-pan before the mill doorway.

There was weight to his step and swagger to his swing. He saw, with not quite clear understanding, that the world looked different than he had ever before seen it.

He strode away down the run, and as the string of his fiddle had dried out by this time, he turned up the bridge and set up the keys. He tightened the hair of the bow, and with a flourish began to play—and he played as he had never played before.

Hardly had he begun, however, when there was an interruption.

Down from the milling clouds shot a bolt of lightning, shivering and splitting the air. It struck the mill fairly, and out of the broken windows and the doors burst clouds of dust, followed by darts and whirls of flame. In a half minute, while the fiddler stared, the dust turned to black smoke, and when a sharp gust of wind swept up the run it threw back the smoke long enough to give him sight of a black cat standing with arched back on the peak of the mill's roof, surrounded by puffs of white steam spurting up through the split wet shingles.

Then the fire rolled up.

Doland Colb laughed while he shuddered. The laugh was for the music that he had in mind; the shudder was for the cat, which a minute before had been so friendly.

"I better play that piece before I forget hit!" he said to himself, giving another flourish to his bow to limber up his arm and shake his coat-sleeve clear.

As he strode along, playing, he passed a cabin down in the valley at the foot of the run. He heard a man remark:

"Sho! That feller's jes a cuttin' hit down, ain't he?"

"Yassuh!" another answered, and then shouted to the fiddler: "Hey, you! 'Low I'll gin ye a night's lodgin' fer some o' that music!"

The fiddler glanced at him with considerable scorn and strode on — playing as he had never played before. Neither the mud nor the hunger that was coming on checked the exuberance of his spirits.

He cared nothing now; many problems had been solved. He was on his way to town—to Rogersville, the nearest one.

He fiddled till he struck the sidewalk, when he ceased and stalked with dignity till he came to the brick hotel, where sat the proprietor at his ease.

"Hello, Dole!" the proprietor hailed. "Just in time! We're goin' to have a dance yere to-night. Got somethin' new fer us?"

"Nope!" Doland grinned, "I'm stoppin' to the Marble Hall to-night."

"What?"

The fiddler scorned the surprise and sauntered on to the big hotel where they played orchestras.

There he tossed a double eagle on the cigar-case and demanded a smoke. This he followed with a call for a room, and then he was shown to the dining-room.

"I kin remember when that feller used to play up the street for his night's lodging," the proprietor remarked, turning the coin over in his hands fondly. "Now look at 'im! Beat's all, don't it?"

DEATH

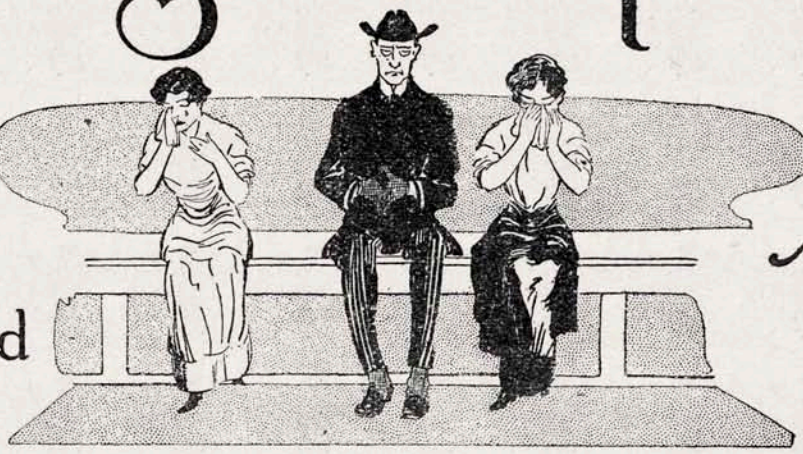
By J. GARTH

TO die is landing on some silent shore,
Where billows never break nor tempests roar;
Ere well we feel the friendly stroke, 'tis o'er.

Nothing but the Truth

by

Richard Duffy



SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

RALPH WITHINGTON, lanky and cadaverous, is in love with Sarah McCreevy, but his gloom so affects her that whenever they are alone together she goes into uncontrollable laughter. He seeks Professor Younglove, who has an establishment for making folks cheerful, and there sees Myrtilla Ashe, Younglove's stenographer, from whom he has fled in days gone by. He lets it be known that he will disappear, and escapes from Younglove's office, leaving the two women disconsolate and determined to find him. Younglove promises his invaluable assistance.

Withington, in his flight, picks up a dwarf actor out of a job. The latter becomes his partner, and though pursued by Younglove and Miss Ashe, the ill-assorted pair make their way to some Jersey railroad yards. They crawl into an empty box-car, which shortly is shunted aboard a train-ferry and carried round the Battery, up to railroad yards near the Harlem River. Here they are captured by some freight-handlers.

CHAPTER VII—(*Continued.*)

THE FUGITIVES SET SAIL.

STARING drowsily at the float platform, Ralph saw no one.

He felt a bit of wood tap him on the head and looked up to see a man standing over him on the roof of the car. The man held a brakeman's stick in his hand.

"All right, all right," Ralph said wearily. "No violence, please."

He was prepared to meet any fate if only he could be released from the ladder.

It was Harry Dunn who stood on top of the car, from which he descended immediately to join his chum Drake on the platform.

"Say, Harry," Drake said, holding up a lantern and scowling at Ralph Withington's blackened, spray-streaked face, "I'll bet he's thrown the kid overboard."

On the instant Sigismund leaped from the folds of Ralph's overcoat, nimble as a fairy.

The two trainmen sprang back a few paces in surprise.

"Oh, mister," Sigismund cried, "we didn't mean anything. Honest, we didn't. We got on the wrong boat by mistake. But we have money and will pay our fare."

For the first time since they had been drenched at the Battery, Ralph Withington was conscious of warmth within him. It was caused by his admiration for Sigismund's quick wit and unperturbed manner.

"Is this man your father?" Harry Dunn asked gruffly.

"You didn't think he was my brudder, did youse?" Sigismund asked by way of reply, and in consummate imitation of a tough boy's voice.

"How could he lie if he wanted to?" Ralph was thinking when he heard a question suddenly addressed to him.

"Where'd you meet this kid?" Harry Dunn asked.

For a second Ralph was nonplused, then he responded solemnly, recalling the Eyrie Building:

"We didn't meet, sir. We collided, and that's the truth."

"Don't try to pull any of that gay stuff," Harry Dunn snarled, and grabbing his chum's arm drew him aside to confer privately.

"Say, aren't you ever going to try to reform?" Sigismund asked Ralph. "Why didn't you tell him something he'd believe?"

"But didn't we collide, Sigismund?"

"There's no use to talk to you," Sigismund declared despondently. "Wait here till I find out what these fellows are going to do with us."

Straightway Sigismund skipped like a little boy over to the spot where the two trainmen stood in close talk.

Alone, a lean, somber figure, black in the distance, remained Ralph. He was sodden, chilled and mushy with a combination of damp potato and coal-dust. His face was smudged black as the night itself.

"Please, misters," Sigismund piped in childish treble to the trainmen, "you won't do nothing to popper an' me, will youse?"

It was Sigismund's calculation that if he could win the sympathy of the men, posing as Ralph's boy, they would be satisfied with a couple of dollars each, and permit Ralph and himself to depart unmolested when the float made dock.

Both men looked down pityingly at the little fellow.

"He ain't your popper, kid," said Harry Dunn, patting Sigismund's shoulder. "He's just telling you lies."

"He is so, my popper; and he never lies," Sigismund wailed in feigned crying. "He doesn't know how."

Harry turned to his chum, saying: "Jim, you ain't married, and so you don't understand kids. Let me manage him."

"All right," Jim grunted, standing by with the lantern.

"Now," Harry Dunn spoke very coaxingly, "you just tell me the truth, and I'll see no harm comes to you."

Sigismund sniffed and sobbed.

"Don't be scared, kid. You're with the right bunch, so spit it out."

Even quick-witted Sigismund needed time to think in such an emergency.

"Me mudder ran away," he wailed, "an' the landlord shut up the flat, and I was playin' hookey from school, and—"

"What did I tell youse?" Harry Dunn asked, turning to his chum. "It's the same story I seen in the papers. The kid's mother ran away to her brother because the father wouldn't give her no money.

"This brother, the kid's uncle, is rich, and he put up the thousand dollars' reward because he don't want the father to have the kid and he was sure he had him. The papers say he's a tall, ugly Eyetalian, so dark he looks almost like a nigger."

"The big fellow looks jes' like that," Jim Drake assented reservedly.

"Don't try to get away, kid," Harry Dunn said tenderly, patting Sigismund's head. He looked toward his chum. "And the paper said the boy was small and puny, with a handkerchief tied round his head. All them dagos wear handkerchiefs tied on their heads until they're sure they are boys, not goils. If they're goils they always wears 'em."

Harry Dunn's breast swelled with pride. He could see his picture in the next day's papers, and a picture of the thousand-dollar check which he and Jim would receive as reward.

"You're married," Jim remarked, not distrustfully. It's hard to be distrustful when half of a thousand dollars may be yours for merely looking wise. "I guess you know more than me about children."

"Run right back, kid, to the big fellow," said Harry Dunn, urging Sigismund gently away. "We reach our dock in a little while. Jim and me will take care of you."

When Sigismund had reached the particularly dark region that Ralph Withington's presence seemed only to make darker, Ralph saluted him with:

"Of course you made it all right, didn't you? They understood when you explained, didn't they? How much shall I offer them?"

"Oh, it's all right," Sigismund answered with mock cheer in his voice. "We can stretch here and rest if we like. They promised to take care of us until we reach the dock."

"What a marvel you are!" Ralph exclaimed. "You lied to them, I suppose."

"You lie down," Sigismund returned, "and rest yourself for a while. When we get to Mott Haven those trainmen who think we are dagos and you kidnaped me are going to hand me and you over to the police for a thousand dollars' reward. I've heard the penalty is anywhere up to twenty years," Sigismund concluded wearily.

"What have you gone and done?"

"I overplayed my part," said Sigismund. "I thought the kid act would fetch them, and it did. It brought them right down on top of us. Let's stretch. I feel six feet tall, and there's an ache in every inch."

"Nevertheless," Ralph persisted, "you and I know that we are not dagos. We can prove it's not true that I kidnaped you. All we have to do is to tell the police—"

"Yes," Sigismund interrupted; "go to the station house and get our names in print as supposed kidnaper and kidnapee, when the fact is that we are only trying to disappear from a Miss Myrtilla Ashe and a few other people. Now let me rest and think. Gee, but I'm a fine actor!"

"Pins and needles!" Ralph groaned and clapped his hands together making a noise like a shot. "Perhaps if I had talked with the men—"

"You would be better off, of course. You would have told them the truth; and then where'd we be?" Sigismund demanded, sitting up.

"No," Ralph answered solemnly, "I would have lied, but I would not have dared such a big fake as you did. I would—"

"Not what you would, but what you are going to do? Can't you suggest anything?"

All Ralph said was: "And I expected to be on our way to the far West by this time to-night!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE HOTEL DI ROCCA.

It had been decided between the trainmen on the float that Harry Dunn, because "he was married and understood children," should take the kidnaper and the little dago in charge.

Only thus were they sure of getting their captives away and to the police without having the other members of the crew in their secret and in the reward.

"Harry, be careful of the big bloke," Jim cautioned.

"I got me stick an' can lay him flat in one whiff if I want to," Harry replied confidently. "The thousand for us, Jim; you wait an' see!"

"Them dagos always has knives. Look out he don't get behind and sting you one," were Jim Drake's final words.

"You got a knife, I know," said Harry Dunn gruffly, when he had

made Ralph and Sigismund get up from the platform and take their hiding-place on the ladder of a car.

He was standing on the roof, looking down at them and holding his club within half a foot of Ralph's begrimed and bewildered face.

"But if youse try to use that knife—" Harry went on. "See this stick"—he flourished it wickedly—"it's made of iron wood, an' I got a gun handy in me pocket here."

"Please don't shoot my popper!" Sigismund bawled like a veritable four-year-old.

From which remark it is apparent that he and Ralph had come to the conclusion their best alternative was to play out the parts of kidnaper and kidnapee to the bitter end.

"I won't hurt you, kid," said Harry Dunn tenderly. "I got kids of me own."

The cars were presently pulled off the float into the yards. After moving slowly and lumberingly this way and that for upward of fifteen minutes they came to a dead stop.

"This is our station," Harry Dunn called down to them. "You big hiker, you hold the kid and get off without hurtin' him or you'll be sorry for it!"

Ralph obeyed orders under the watchful eye of Harry Dunn, set Sigismund on his feet, and immediately the three found their way across tracks and between stalled cars under the guidance of the trainman.

Harry Dunn kept the big man walking about one and a half paces in front of him. He held Sigismund with his left hand, and in his right kept his club ready to fell Ralph at the first sign of resistance.

To relieve the monotony of their amble through the dark he indulged in occasional husky remarks of this tenor:

"You dirty dago, you!" His club would be gripped tighter. "Try a knife on me and I'll open your nut with this toothpick of mine!"

"Can I help it if my mother and father were Italians?" was the only reply Ralph offered to Harry Dunn's fiercest threats.

"That's the nearest to a common-sense lie I've yet heard from Ralph," thought Sigismund hopefully, and continued his wailing plea that he did not "want his popper hurted."

They came to the outskirts of the yards where they climbed a steep, gravelly slope, from which they were to enter on to the street at the top.

"Don't cry, kid," Harry Dunn muttered soothingly. "We'll soon be in the street now, an' we're going to have a nice ride in a trolley-car."

"Is popper comin' with us?" Sigismund asked.

Before the trainman could say a word, somehow Sigismund slipped or stumbled, and, losing hold of Harry Dunn's hand, went down on his face with a childlike yell of terror and pain.

"Ah, youse ain't hurt!" said the trainman, stooping quickly to recover his charge.

Sigismund's yell was Ralph's signal. He whirled about and with his square-toed number twelve shoe dealt Harry Dunn a terrific kick in the pit of the stomach.

The trainman's hands went up into the air, his club flew beyond them, and he, with a bellow that almost immediately dwindled into a groan, doubled in two and rolled down the slope like a ball.

Meanwhile Ralph had caught Sigismund up in his arms and ran up to the street.

"I told you, Ralph, you could do it with that foot," the Lilliputian observed with a cackling laugh as Ralph set him down on the far side of the iron fence that railed off the freight-yards.

"We must find a cheap hotel somewhere," Ralph said as they came within the light of a store-window. "If I look as dirty as you do, I'm sure they won't let us on a car."

"You don't look any dirtier," Sigismund returned, surveying Ralph; "but there's so much more of you than

there is of me for dirt to stick to. Besides, I'm dead tired and that hungry I could eat raw horse."

With frequent glances behind them to make sure they were not being followed, the big man and the Lilliputian walked for fully half an hour in the Bronx, which was an uncharted sea to them.

At length they paused before a long, two-story frame building, in which all the ground-floor windows were lighted. On a dingy electric sign they read:

HOTEL DI ROCCA
G. Salvatore, Prop.

If either of them had known the Bronx as well as each knew Manhattan Island he would have realized that they had been walking in a jagged circle all this time, so that they brought up in the very neighborhood from which they believed themselves far removed.

The Hotel di Rocca had once been a family house to which a store-front and extra windows had been added. Ralph and Sigismund entered what had formerly been the house-door, but was now called the hotel-entrance. Sigismund waited in the vestibule while Ralph opened a door at the left that gave admission to the most popular section of G. Salvatore's establishment.

Not above half a minute had Sigismund been alone when a short, thickset Italian slipped suspiciously into the vestibule, and, laying his hand on Sigismund's handkerchiefed head, whispered a few words in his native tongue.

The little fellow spoke German, French, Swedish, and English. In fact, he could make a fist at the language of any country in which he had toured; but as he had never played in Italy, he was obliged to say to the stranger:

"I don't speak Italian."

The stranger put a finger to one nostril, smiled, and was gone.

Meanwhile Ralph was standing in a room where, through a dense haze of throttling tobacco smoke, he saw a large crowd of laboring men playing cards at various small tables. From the boiling excitement of their manner and speech he realized that they were Italians to a man.

"Where's the proprietor?" Ralph inquired in a fairly loud voice.

"Me, *signore*," announced a stoutish, happy-faced individual with an enormous mustache and an equally enormous watch-chain.

Questioningly he considered the tall, coal-smudged, water-logged person who studied him from great gloomy eyes.

"We've been in an automobile collision," Ralph explained bruskly, bracing his shoulders as he had seen Sigismund do when addressing any one. "We ran into ten tons of wet coal. Had our choice to be drowned or smothered. Our car is going to be taken away for junk to-morrow, our clothes are ruined, but no one fortunately hurt or killed."

"Where dissa happen?" G. Salvatore inquired.

"Oh, back a few blocks on the avenue," Ralph answered. He pulled his wallet from his pocket and handed three single bills to the proprietor. "We're in a hurry to get home, but want to clean up and have some supper first. If that doesn't cover the charges, let me know."

"Gee," Sigismund thought, eavesdropping at the crack of the door between the hall and the bar, "if he isn't beginning to know how to lie at last! He'll be a wonder with some practise."

The rates of the Hotel di Rocca were twenty-five cents a night for the cheapest room and fifty for the best the house afforded. G. Salvatore grabbed the three dollar bills and examined them quickly.

"Come, *signore*," he said then; "I show room."

As he laid eyes on Sigismund in the hall he caught him up in his arms and babbled to him in Italian that he was a brave little boy not to cry or be frightened for being in an automobile wreck.

"Whatta you like for sup'?" G. Salvatore asked, about to retire from his guests' room. "Biffastek, spaghett', coffee?"

Ralph informed him that such a supper would be satisfactory, and the sooner the better.

Down to the kitchen went G. Salvatore, where his wife sat in her chair by the stove, asleep over her stocking-basket. Leaning over her, G. Salvatore kissed his spouse softly. She only muttered a prayer in her sleep; but when he brushed his enormous spokes of mustache across her nostrils she woke with a loud sneeze.

"What a fool you are—"

"Get busy," he answered her in their own language, and pressed the three dollars into her hand. "Richa millionaire and boy up-stairs. Automobile smash. Wanta da sup'."

One hour later, when supper had been served and eaten and Ralph had informed G. Salvatore that he would spend the night there, a great and disturbing noise of people's voices was heard outside the Hotel di Rocca.

The card-players forgot all about their game and stood up, wondering and cautious. G. Salvatore made a rush for the street door. His was a respectable place, and he wanted no fighting or rowing outside the building.

As he put his hand to the knob the door was pushed open from the street-side and a trimly built, hard-faced policeman stalked in.

He shut the door behind him and brushed G. Salvatore to the left of him, saying loudly and with authority in Italian first and then in English:

"Everybody stay right in their seat and they won't be any trouble! Play cards!" he added as they watched him open-mouthed.

Then G. Salvatore's patrons dropped onto their chairs and pretended to be interested in their cards.

The policeman tapped three times sharply on the door at his back.

Again the door was opened, revealing to G. Salvatore's nervous inquisitive eyes a great crowd of men and women, whom three policemen held at bay. The women were shrieking hysterically and the men rent the air with maledictions.

They were all Italians, and G. Salvatore knew very well what they were raving about. Yet he kept a respectable place and had nothing to fear. Suddenly he bethought himself of the big, tall man and the little boy in the room up-stairs. Consternation froze his soul.

For three dollars he had harbored a kidnaper!

It would ruin his business in the neighborhood. He would lose his license.

He was just getting ready to tear his hair out by the roots when the policeman reminded him of the presence of an American, who had entered in response to the club-taps and stood silently patient, but suspicious, beside the officer of the law.

It was Harry Dunn, the trainman from the float.

Acting as interpreter the policeman informed G. Salvatore that he was on the trail of a tall, thin, dark man, a kidnaper, who had with him a very small boy, wearing a handkerchief round his head. The trainman, he went on, had captured the kidnaper and the boy and was taking them to the station-house when the kidnaper assaulted his captor and escaped with the child.

They had searched every hotel in the district, when an Italian called up the police station and said he saw a big fellow and a little boy going into the Hotel di Rocca. He was sure he was the kidnaper for whom a thousand dollars reward was advertised. Whether the Italian was right or not, they must search the Hotel di Rocca.

"I am an honest man! I am an honest man!" cried G. Salvatore, with a guilty air.

The truth is, he had had a faint suspicion that there was something queer about his strange guests, but the three dollars had put it out of his mind.

"Come up to Room 6," he continued, still reaching all the high notes of his voice. "I will show you. I did not know!"

They went up-stairs on tiptoe, the

policeman first, G. Salvatore behind him, and Harry Dunn, the trainman, last.

"Better have your gun ready," Harry Dunn whispered to the policeman, "them fellers always carry knives."

"Shut up!" the officer whispered in reply.

By instructions of the policeman G. Salvatore knocked at the door of Room 6 sharply.

"Who's there?" came in the hollow tones of Ralph Withington.

"*Signore,*" was the reply in pleasant tone, "I am G. Salvatore of Hotel di Rocca. I want to seea you."

"You can't. I've got all my clothes off!" said Ralph.

"You mus' go outa dis hotel righta 'way," G. Salvatore thundered. "Respectable place. No taka bums, noa crooks, noa kidnap man — noa, not never. I am a honest proprietor."

"What's come over you?" Ralph roared, and at the same moment turned the key and swung the door open.

The policeman burst into the room first, covering Ralph with his revolver. Harry Dunn hid behind the officer's broad frame, as did G. Salvatore, who shut the door.

"Act right," said the policeman in Italian, "an' you won't get hurt!"

"Talk English, which is the only language I understand," Ralph retorted, "and you'll find out something, if that's what you came for."

All about the room were hung dirty, damp clothes; and Ralph, in his underwear, looked two inches above his actual height.

The bed had been pushed up close to the robin's-egg-blue bureau, and Sigismund, also in his underclothes, sat on the foot of it, his feet balanced on an open drawer.

He was shaving with Ralph's safety-razor before a cross-eyed mirror.

"There's the poor kid," Harry Dunn muttered to the officer. "See—he's given him his razor to play with, so he wouldn't cry."

The sharp ears of Sigismund had caught the trainman's words, and he jumped up on the bureau at once, confronting all of them with a little face creamy with lather.

"Mr. Officer," he began with dignity, "this trainman here did find us on his float—we'll admit that, all right—"

"What's all that talking and yelling outside of your hotel, if it's such a respectable place, Mr. Proprietor?" Ralph interrupted, not so much for the purpose of flinging a gibe at G. Salvatore, as to warn Sigismund by a wink to be on his guard in what he was saying.

"That's a mob ready to lynch you, you big bully, if they can get their hands on you for stealing away this—" the trainman was saying when the policeman cut in.

"Shut up," said the officer; "let's hear the kid's story. Go ahead, kid!"

"The trainman's boat is seaworthy, all right," Sigismund continued; "but we were not out for a ride on the river. Like a pair of boys we hopped on the train, and before we could hop off again found ourselves afloat."

"Where did your cars come from?" the policeman inquired of the trainman in an undertone.

"From Hoboken," Harry Dunn replied surlily. He felt the policeman was not giving him the treatment his important discovery deserved.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the policeman said with a grunt. "Keep a movin', kid."

"We would have given his pal and him a couple of dollars each if they had minded their own business and let us go," pursued Sigismund. "But this fellow was sure he was in for a thousand dollars reward for rescuing a kidnaped dago, and so we had to give him the slip.

"What does he get by it? Just to prove to you, Mr. Officer, that I'm no kid, but thirty-four years old and a Lilliputian actor out of a job, you can come up and feel my beard. Come on. I won't hurt you, and, besides, you've got your pistol."

The policeman walked over to the bureau and rubbed his big hand over Sigismund's face.

"Some whiskers, eh, for a kid?" Sigismund asked with a roguish twinkle in his eye. "Watch me step."

Forthwith Sigismund began to sing a music-hall song in German. None of them understood a word; but his pantomime and dancing were so amusing, as he imitated men and women of various ages attempting the waltz and other steps, that the policeman and G. Salvatore laughed till the tears rolled down their cheeks.

Harry Dunn, the trainman, did not laugh. He looked on scowling and muttering. Sigismund began to act up toward him. The sourer Harry Dunn appeared the funnier Sigismund became.

Ralph did not dare to laugh, remembering his constitutional peculiarity. Yet he had never in his life wanted to laugh so badly. He recalled his visit to Professor Younglove that morning, and kept saying to himself: "I shall—I will be better for eating Loso Peanuts."

But when, after piercing the trainman with every barb of his wit, little Sigismund began to improvise a song, beginning: "Oh, Mr. Trainman, won't you lend me a slice of that thou'?" neither Loso Peanuts, Vita-Pull, or Vibrational Control could hold back Ralph Withington's famous laugh any longer.

He sat as though doubled in pain on the edge of the bed and gave out that junglelike cachinnation and roar no human being except himself had ever produced or been able to copy.

In alarm both the trainman and G. Salvatore made for the door. The policeman stood his ground and thought of calling for an ambulance.

"It's all right, Mr. Officer," explained Sigismund, who had never heard Ralph laugh, but had heard him talk about it, "that's what my friend calls a laugh." To himself he added: "And he used to think he didn't know how to lie!"

The policeman's eyes flashed and his forehead wrinkled as he took out his memorandum-book and began to glance through the pages.

Then he held the book with one finger at a marked place, and told the trainman and the hotel proprietor to go down-stairs and inform everybody that a mistake had been made. These two men were not the kidnaper and the child, but he knew who they were, and wanted one of his fellow officers to slip up without the crowd seeing him and come to Room 6.

G. Salvatore went off, highly elated and with repeated exclamations about his respectable place to Harry Dunn. But the trainman was solemn and mute.

"I guess I've called you fellows' number all right," the policeman said, consulting his memorandum-book from time to time. "Your name's Ralph Withington, and you disappeared this morning with a little fellow—a dwarf named Meislahn. The last seen of you you were on a train of empty cars in the Hoboken yards.

"We got a still-alarm about you this afternoon from headquarters. There's no charge against you, but your friends are worried. I've a good description of both of you here, but I couldn't recognize you in your underclothes very well, could I?

"The report says, too, the big man has a laugh like a singing hyena, and it shakes the window-panes. You may as well admit I'm right, the both of you, because I have the goods on you."

Ralph gazed straight through the officer's thick frame and mumbled something about being betrayed by a laugh.

"All right, all right," Sigismund announced cheerily, "but if there's no charge against us, why not let us tend to our own business and go to sleep. I'm tired."

"There's no charge exactly," the policeman replied, "but you are specially wanted in connection with another disappearance. It's a woman,

and we people believe you know where she is to be found."

"A woman? What woman?" Ralph cried.

"Sarah McCreevy," the officer answered. "She disappeared a little while after you did. Now own up and tell me what you know. It's the best way."

"This is the first we know about it," Ralph declared solemnly. "I didn't mean any more to tell the truth every chance I got; but I can't lie about Sarah. Poor Sarah! If she'd only waited. I was going to write to her to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

ON MANY TRAILS.

In view of Mrs. Baxter's vindictiveness on the telephone toward Professor Younglove, when he called her house up from the Hoboken station, and of her dark hints about what Ezra McCreevy and the butcher, Herman Swartz, would do if they "could get hold" of him, the professor's self-confidence and intrepidity in going straightway to confront these gentlemen was nothing less than admirable.

Even Myrtilla Ashe, who had remained on the Secaucus to return to Hoboken and who found Younglove in the ferry-house, waiting for a Twenty-Third Street boat, urged caution and deliberate action.

"How can one tell what a vulgar rich person like that woman's uncle might or might not do?" Myrtilla asked, as she and the professor went aboard together. "He blames you for her disappearance, when you had nothing to do with it, and it would be just his vulgar way to try to ruin your Health Circle for mere spite."

"A good soldier," Younglove argued, "always faces the enemy. I want you to go right over to the office and stay till I see you or call you.

"I've been trying for years to get into close touch with a man worth a lot of money, and now that I have learned that Ezra McCreevy is worth forty to fifty thousand dollars, I'm not going to lose the chance of meeting him even if it is his present intention to throw me out of the house."

"You said he was old," she rejoined, "and I did not fear any physical harm he might do to you."

"So you wouldn't want to see me hurt, not in any little way, Myrtilla?" Younglove queried.

It was the second time he had called her by her first name. To do so fell quite naturally to him, he felt, as it did to lay his hand on her wrist and fix his blue eyes on hers with a concentration he never devoted to any of his patients.

"I count on you to help me recover Walter—I mean Mr. Raleigh," Myrtilla replied, lowering her lids and withdrawing her hand for the necessary purpose of smoothing her veil.

"I shall, I will succeed!" Younglove declared, uttering his most popular health and success formula, the while he played his finger-tips against one another.

In just what he meant to succeed he did not mention to Myrtilla; but lapsed into one of his moods of concentration, his gaze wandering far away upon the river.

Myrtilla understood that he did not wish to be disturbed in such moments, and was silent. Moreover, she was turning over in her mind all he had told her about his hunt for Walter, as she called him, and the Lilliputian.

Younglove did not speak again until they were leaving the boat on the New York side.

"I do not object to telling you, just for yourself, Myrtilla," he said, rolling her name like candy on his tongue, "that I have a firm hope Miss McCreevy will communicate with us at the office."

"I must confess, professor," Myrtilla replied, "that I really have no interest in that person. In fact, if it were not for your training of me in

the Health Circle, I should say I hate her and consider her an impudent, loud-mouthed piece of furniture."

"But you will be loyal to me, will you not, Myrtilla?"

"Of course, of course, as I must be to myself; but I must watch my vibrations whenever that person is mentioned."

Younglove had been preparing to confide to Myrtilla that, as it had been his suggestion to Miss McCreevy she would do well to be among the missing when her uncle and his butcher eligible appeared, there could be small doubt but that Sarah would keep the Health Circle discreetly advised of her whereabouts.

He said no more about Miss McCreevy therefore, and helping Myrtilla on to a cross-town car, walked the short distance eastward to Mrs. Baxter's house.

Mrs. Baxter herself admitted him. Lean and fidgety, she was all atremble. If her two tiny dots of black eyes had been stilettos he would have been pierced from front to back.

"I am Professor Younglove," he announced nevertheless in his suavest manner. "Are you Mrs. Baxter?"

"I am," she answered curtly, slamming the door. "Step into the parlor."

Unperturbed, Younglove placed his hat and overcoat on the rack in the hall, and, with a bow, indicated that she was to precede him into the parlor.

As Younglove entered after her he made a mental note that the air of the long, old-fashioned room was bristling with inimical vibrations.

It required a few seconds for his eyes to become accustomed to the light; yet he stood with his back to the windows, balancing almost unnoticeably on heel and toe and playing his finger-tips together.

"How do you do? and good health to all who are here," he addressed them gravely, with authority.

"Speech! Speech!" shrilled a voice far down in the room.

"No, not exactly a speech, pretty Polly," Younglove said in his most beguiling tones to the bird.

On the sofa at the right side of the room he saw lanky Mrs. Baxter, stiff and prim, beside the ponderous and fat Mrs. Howe. Opposite them on chairs sat two men. Younglove had no difficulty in distinguishing which was Ezra McCreevy and which Mr. Swartz, the butcher.

Not one of these four persons addressed a word to him.

"No speech, pretty Polly," Younglove went on, his eyes apparently seeing only the parrot; "but the word of success and health to these good friends of ours here, and then—a moment's silence that we may inspire strength, all of us, for the business we have in hand."

"No speeches, and no silences either," Ezra McCreevy broke out in a high, nasal voice. "All we want is to know what you've done with my niece—do you hear?"

Mr. McCreevy was a short, wizened, slight man, with white hair and a yellow skin. He wore a shepherd's-plaid cutaway suit, with straps under the instep of his boots to hold down his trouser legs.

"I am honored, sir, to meet you, Mr. McCreevy," was Younglove's response.

Before testy Mr. McCreevy knew what the professor was about Younglove was holding his bony hand, murmuring:

"Vibrations, perhaps, a trifle jangling to-day. It may be the unseasonable cold weather."

Ezra McCreevy looked at the professor's round, sunshiny face, trying to frame an expression of disgust and ire suitable to the moment; but Younglove was now gripping the butcher's big beefy palm.

"And you, also, I am glad to know, Mr. Herman Swartz, I believe, of the Bronx. You cater to our merely physical needs in the way of meats and groceries, as I cater to our universal

needs, psychical and physical. Both of us deal only in the first quality of goods and never give short weight."

"Dot's correct," the astonished Herman Swartz observed; "but how do you know? You ain't never bought noddings by me."

"Your vibrations are full, but a slight heaviness is noticeable, Mr. Swartz. Nothing to worry about, however," and paying no heed to Mr. Swartz's question, Younglove turned with a bow to the two ladies on the sofa.

"Don't you touch my hand," snapped Mrs. Baxter, putting them both behind her back. "I don't believe in fortune-tellers nor anything like that."

"Ha-ha-ha!" Younglove laughed cheerily. "I am no fortune-teller, Mrs. Baxter. I help people to make their own fortune in health-getting so they may win success by doing what they can do best to the best of their ability. And this lady, whom I have not had the pleasure—"

"Mrs. Howe," said Mrs. Baxter; "she is one of Sarah McCreevy's dearest friends."

Mrs. Howe gave a short, jerky bow of the head to Younglove and then turned to stare at Mrs. Baxter to see whether she was poking fun at her. She and Sarah McCreevy could not bear the sight of each other; and Mrs. Baxter knew it.

"Votes for women!" Hannibal, the parrot, shrilled. "Who-eeeee!"

"Right you are, Polly," Younglove said, waving his hand toward the bird.

"Mrs. Baxter," Ezra McCreevy began irritably, "will you please stow that cussed bird somewheres? She seems to have as much to say as Professor Younglove. And it's all I can do to listen to one such talker."

"You naughty, naughty Hannibal. You'll be drowned;" with which Mrs. Baxter quickly went over and, picking up the parrot-perch, put Hannibal in the back parlor behind closed doors.

The statement that she and Sarah McCreevy were the dearest friends had been rankling in Mrs. Howe's ample bosom. It was a nasty, underhand kind of dig to give, anyhow, she thought, and when Mrs. Baxter returned to the sofa she broke out before even Younglove could say a word.

"All I wanted to know, Professor Younglove," she told him, "was whether you caught that little rat, Meislahn. He owes me a whacking big board bill, and I want to have him arrested for beating a hotel."

"I have no word yet to give you, Mrs. Howe, but I have every reason to believe I shall have news for you later in the day. I have a whole railroad company interested in my case. Here's one of my cards. Call me up at any time and come in to see me," and Younglove gave her the card.

"Sit right back on the sofa where you were!" Ezra McCreevy cried snappishly. "As the dearest friend of Sarah, I want you to stay. You may have an idea, or be of some help."

Mrs. Howe sank back into her seat, flabbergasted. She might hate Sarah, but Sarah's uncle actually scared volition out of her; and Mrs. Howe had a will of her own seven days of the week.

"All dot hand-holding business iss ofer, ain'd it?" Herman Swartz inquired of Younglove. "Now I want to tell you somedings. Der lady I was to marry to-day, she ain'd here. We was going to Atlantic City to-night. I had it all fixed; ain'd dot right, M'Greefy?"

Swartz gave a glance at Mr. McCreevy, but allowed him no time to reply.

"We was coming back from our honeymoon on Monday morning. I told the boys at the store I'd be there at twelve o'clock, and me and my wife would settle right down to a sensible life. Now, what you done did mit my wife, you smart provessor?"

"But she isn't your wife, and you haven't even met Miss McCreevy, as I understand," said Younglove.

"Dot makes noddings out. She would have been if you didn't do her something so she run away—and she wrote a queer letter, too. Like one of der letters der coroner collects," Swartz said accusingly.

"Oh, for mercy sake, man, don't talk like that!" Mrs. Baxter whined from the sofa.

"As a matter of absolute logic," interposed Ezra McCreevy in his most acid manner, "how could Mr. Swartz marry this woman if she wasn't here? How could he even meet her? Now, you who call yourself a man of education, professor, answer me that. You say she is not his wife. I say how could she be when she wasn't here? How could he meet her even—"

"Your logic is without flaw, Mr. McCreevy," Younglove replied most ingratiatingly; "but your vibrations are, if I must say it—"

"You just leave my vibrations alone, Younglove," Ezra went on, rising to one of his frenzies. "You have no more to say about my vibrations than you have about my socks. You are responsible for my niece's disappearance, what with your treatment of her and of the man who fooled her into believing he was going to marry her. You—"

"I am responsible? My dear Mr.—"

"No mush for me, thanks. I know all about your health institute or circle. Sarah told Mrs. Baxter before she ever went to see you of the letters she got from you."

"All I said was just what she told me herself," Mrs. Baxter chimed dolefully.

"Now, there are two people that I'm going to get by the short hair unless this thing is settled darned quickly. One is that man Withington, who played Sarah such a scurvy trick, and who, from what Mrs. Baxter said, is a kind of human nuisance, on all counts. The other is you. Why, man, I'll put you out of business. It ain't a legitimate business, to my mind, in the first place."

"My business, as you call it," Younglove retorted quietly, "is there for you or anybody to examine. It's done open and aboveboard. I would take some notice of your threats, Mr. McCreevy, if it were not that your vibrations are in such a state of disorder—"

"Drat you, man, just keep off my vibrations!" Ezra squeaked, much as if Younglove had stamped on his foot. "All I got to say is that I've sent out a still alarm through the police for this Withington fellow and for Sarah, and if I find you and your vibrations are up to any monkey business, I'll—I'll—"

"Wass ist den dis here fibrating business?" Herman Swartz interrupted, pulling his blond mustache with both hands at once and then folding his hands complacently on his well-indicated abdomen as though he dared Younglove to explain. "I been in groceries and meat aboud forty years, and nobody ain'd never yet try to sell me any such goods. Iss the Pure Food Act on it?"

"Hold your tongue, Herman," Ezra snarled.

Mr. Swartz's red face went purple with rage, but he did as ordered.

It was not in Herman to offend a rich customer, especially when he expected to join the family. Time enough then.

"There's something besides groceries and meat in this microcosm of ours," Younglove flung at the heavy, red-faced, prosperous grocer with gentle irony.

"Now, vot's dot again? Microsomething," Swartz cut in, venting the anger Ezra had roused on Younglove. "Anypotty should know you fellers is skins, the kind of langwitch you chuck in a man's face."

"I'm willing to answer all questions, whoever asks them," the professor stated slowly, "but I can't talk to more than one of you at the time. Now I'm talking to Mr. McCreevy. I'll take you next in turn, Herman Swartz, and

whatever groceries or meats you have to offer."

The door-bell rang.

"You'll have to excuse me," Mrs. Baxter announced, jumping up. "It's the girl's afternoon off, and I have to answer the bell."

"Maybe it's some word from the police," suggested Mrs. Howe.

The idea imposed silence on the others assembled in the room. Younglove took advantage of the first moment of liberty he had since entering the parlor to find a chair for himself and sit down.

In walked Mrs. Baxter presently, followed by a well-built, quick-eyed boy, who showed a lustrous red pompadour as he snatched off his hat.

"Why, Algernon!" Younglove exclaimed; and, turning to the others, added: "This is Algernon, my office-boy; in fact, the perfect office-boy."

"How do you do? Good health," said Algernon to the company; and then handed a sealed letter to his employer.

"May I be excused?" Younglove said, and tore open the envelope.

The two men and two women were all eyes on Younglove as he read the enclosure. Algernon stood by, his hat in his hand and his eyes riveted on the tips of his shoes.

There were really two enclosures. One sheet of paper contained a short message from Myrtilla, informing Younglove that the people at the Hoboken station had telephoned to say they could find no trace of the two persons Younglove had asked them to search for in the yards. Also, she was enclosing a note that she herself had opened, because it seemed better to do so in his absence.

This note had been brought to Myrtilla by one of the elevator men, who said he had found it on the floor of his car, and was unable to guess even who might have dropped it, as the building was crowded with people all the afternoon.

Younglove read the second enclosure thoughtfully and went into one of his concentrating moods over it, as well he might:

DEAR PROFESSOR:

I don't know whether this will ever reach you, but if it doesn't I don't know what will happen to me. I got out before uncle and the butcher arrived, as there was nothing else to do. I left that note for Mrs. Baxter and now I'm scared stiff. Suppose, I've been thinking, it gave a turn to uncle and he got a shock. Then where would I be?

I could never forgive myself if anything happened to him, and besides, the way his will is now I wouldn't get a cent.

You said you'd manage this matter, and you better had. What do I know about disappearing? I never disappeared in my life.

I've been walking round Central Park till I feel even the statues could identify me. I'm going to take a chance and sneak into your building on the basement floor and leave this in the elevator.

Of course you always understood, I hope, that I meant to pay you well if you fixed up Ralph and me and got us righted with uncle. So don't think your time and expenses will not be appreciated.

But keep your promise and act at once. I can't be left alone first by Ralph and then by you; and I'd rather be ground up into mincemeat than marry the richest butcher in the Bronx or anywhere else.

A FRIEND IN DISTRESS.

"Act at once," Younglove reflected. "And the only clue she gives me to act on is the statues in Central Park. Yet she says she does not know how to disappear!"

He folded both enclosures, replaced them in the envelope, which he put in his pocket, and, telling Algernon to bid Miss Ashe wait for him at the office, dismissed the boy.

"When you're all through with your affairs," Ezra McCreevy opened up tartly, "I suppose you'll remember, sir, that you came here to repair the damage you have done to mine. Or maybe you think I can be coming down every day in the week to present a husband to my fool-headed niece."

"Calm yourself—calm!" Younglove adjured, waving his hands slowly toward McCreevy, the while his brain was revolving a daring scheme to get himself out of his present predicament and gather a couple of rich clients.

All he needed was time. Time—that no man's money could buy and only the fertile mind of Thaddeus Younglove could procure.

"I won't be calm!" old Ezra squealed. "Drat my boots if I'll be calm just because you ask me!"

"Then listen and show some sense," Younglove retorted. "I have just received word from my secretary, who had the pleasure of meeting Miss McCreevy this morning, that your niece telephoned to the office at about a quarter after four that she was leaving for Atlantic City, to be gone for several days.

"She did not know when she would be back, but as she had an appointment with me for to-morrow morning, she did not want me to be expecting her."

"But Miss McCreevy knew you went after that worthless Mr. Withington," observed Mrs. Baxter. "And why should she leave such a strange letter for me, slipping out of the house unnoticed when she expected her uncle, because he had written to her?"

"Nothing is so easily explained," Younglove answered. "In the tumultuous conditions of her vibrations—"

"Oh, drat vibrations!" Ezra ejaculated.

"Well, then, in the state of mind she found herself on account of Mr. Withington's strange and sudden behavior, she clean forgot about her uncle's visit. Every idea went out of her head except the mysterious conduct of Mr. Withington. Is anything more natural?"

"But that letter she left for me?" Mrs. Baxter argued.

Younglove asked to be allowed to read the letter. It was given to him, and, having read it, he returned it to Mrs. Baxter.

"The letter just proves my point," Younglove commented. "She can think of nothing but that man and his two suit-cases. When she wrote it she probably had no idea where she was going, and therefore the letter is vague.

"But you see that she is in her right mind. Why shouldn't she go to Atlantic City? Why shouldn't she cancel her appointments with me, with her dentist, or anybody? People forget to do it often enough, and it costs us time and money; but Miss McCreevy is a lady."

"Yes, and there are millions of ladies in Atlantic City," Ezra McCreevy rasped. "How are we going to find her there?"

"I don't think that should be hard," Younglove replied, talking slowly as he realized the pyramid he was standing on end for himself. "My secretary asked for her address—as we keep in close touch with all our clients—and she said she did not know where she would stop, except that it would be at some small, quiet hotel. We could write to her in care of general delivery."

"If that ain't my fool of a niece all over, cutting up like a monkey on a stick!" Ezra fairly gasped. "Why couldn't she act like any other woman and wait till she got a husband to take her to Atlantic City?"

"You forget, my dear friend," said Younglove with more assurance, feeling he had the company running with him, "that Miss McCreevy had contracted an attachment for Mr. Withington before you mentioned Mr. Swartz."

"Hang Withington!" cried Ezra. "He's jest the most ornery sort of quitter."

"Now, if I might suggest a way to you for handling Miss McCreevy in her present disturbed condition—"

"Go ahead, Younglove. I wish anybody had the managing of her but me. Good gravy! if I had known forty years ago a man's niece could give him so much trouble, I'd have married and had trouble with children of my own."

"Then why don't you and Mr. Swartz go down to Atlantic City?" Younglove asked. "It will be easy to trace your niece there through General Delivery."

"Me go to Atlantic City?" Ezra demanded contemptuously. "Why, I haven't been out of the Bronx but twice in the last twelve months. That's where my houses and land are, and that's where I belong."

"But it's like dis," Swartz interposed. "If we go to Adlandig Cidy and find Sarah, can't I marry her by der ocean just as well as here in New York by land? Besides, you was going to come mit us, anyway, on der honeymoon, wasn't you, till she got agguainted mit me?"

"Nothing of the sort!" Ezra snapped. "Whoever heard of a bridal couple having a second man trailing along on their honeymoon? I meant to get right back to my house in Vandyver Avenue this very evening."

"I don't think it would be wise for you to write to your niece and tell her to return to New York, in view of the strain she is now under," Younglove counseled. "I urge you strongly to go down there, see her, cheer her up—both you and Mr. Swartz—and of course, as Mr. Swartz says, Miss McCreevy can be married at Atlantic City as easily as here."

Ezra meditated, puffing his thin lips as though he had a pipe between them. "I'll go, then," he announced at length, "but right away and now.

"Come on, Herman; find your bag and we'll be off. There's any number of trains to Atlantic City, and the sooner I get down there and put some sense into Sarah the sooner I'll be back."

He got up spryly from his chair and trotted out to the hall to find his hat and coat. Herman Swartz lumbered after him.

Mrs. Baxter and Mrs. Howe were saying good-by, when the latter broke out with:

"Suppose the police should come here about Mr. Withington, what could we two women do?"

"I never once thought of it!" Mrs. Baxter cried. "Now, Mr. McCreevy, I don't want the police coming to my house unless you're here. I don't know how to talk to them, and besides—"

"They won't come here, Mrs. Baxter," Younglove put in with one of his curved gestures that meant "don't worry." "I'll have that alarm fixed so the report will come to my address. That is, unless you have an objection, Mr. McCreevy."

"There can't be any report now about Sarah — that is, we don't need any—so long's we know where she is," said Ezra, opening the door. "As for that fellow Withington—"

"I'll take care of him," interposed Younglove, "and if you and Mr. Swartz wish it I'll show you the quickest way to Atlantic City."

Whether they very much wished it or not, Younglove stuck to them like a leech until he saw them irrevocably aboard a train at the Pennsylvania Station. They had been obliged to wait half an hour, during which the professor and Ezra between them made arrangements with the police over the telephone.

Younglove wanted Ezra to cancel the search order for his niece, but the old man declined, saying:

"If she's in Atlantic City it won't do any harm, and if she isn't it may do some good. With a woman like Sarah I won't be sure where she is until I see her there."

"And you'll wire me your address as soon as you find a stopping-place?" Younglove asked.

Herman Swartz had already gone into the car to pick a choice seat. Ezra remained on the station platform, talking with Younglove, for whom he was beginning to show the faintest signs of confidence and respect.

"I will," Ezra replied. "You'll keep me notified if anything important happens, won't you? Send your tele-

grams 'collect,'" and, presenting his ticket, he went through the gate.

To send his telegram "collect." was the only intimation Younglove received that Ezra had any dawning suspicion of compensating the professor for his time and services. Yet Younglove returned to his office with the satisfaction of knowing that his magnetic currents, at first so repellent to Sarah's uncle, were becoming attractive.

If things went only half-way well with him, Ezra in time should become one of his most profitable patients. It made Younglove smile to think of Sarah's worry about her uncle's will.

Though about sixty-five, the old man seemed sound and good for many years to come. The only thing the matter with him was his cantankerous disposition and his tendency to change his mind unreasonably. No person was more suitable as a test for the Health Circle's theory and practise.

Yet the professor had too risky and perilous an enterprise under way now to think of losing time patting himself on the back. Ezra would not find his niece at Atlantic City, and Younglove must have traced her before he returned to New York if he hoped to keep in the old man's good graces.

Find Sarah, recover Withington, and smooth the way to their union meant money, steady patients — and Myrtilla!

Withington ought not to remain long among the missing, he reasoned, because in his talk over the telephone with the police he had been able to give much more definite information about the last seen of Ralph and his dwarf companion than Ezra had provided.

Sarah—as he murmured the name to himself Younglove thought of the acreage of Central Park and the absolute heedlessness of the woman in writing him a letter without putting any address or place of meeting in it.

It was dark now. She would not dare stay in the park, or would she? It might be she had ventured again to communicate with his office.

It was six o'clock when Younglove reached the office. A light shone through the glass half of the door, but the door was locked.

He opened it with his key, not surprised that Algernon should be gone; but disappointed that Myrtilla had not waited for him.

A note lay on his desk. It was signed "M. A."

> I waited till a quarter before six, and could wait no longer. I told you it is my life-work to recover him. I'll be down first thing in the morning.

The message had palpably been scrawled in haste. Younglove considered it in somewhat crestfallen mood.

He had counted on Myrtilla to aid him in tracing Miss McCreevy. He had intended even, having the money, to give her a good dinner at a restaurant and talk with her about the Health Circle, its fine prospects, and about himself.

From the moment she confided to him her years-agone engagement to Ralph Withington or Walter Raleigh, all the professor's latent yearning for his secretary grew more and more apparent to him. He was ready now to neglect his business if necessary to win her.

And in this most ticklish situation in which he had ever been plunged she had left the office with less courtesy than she had always shown when she could have had no idea that he cared for her. After he had sent a specific message, too, by Algernon that she was to wait till he came.

He sat at his desk and ate a whole box of Loso Peanuts, the first morsel of food he had tasted since breakfast.

"I shall—I will be better for eating Loso Peanuts," he said to himself over and over again.

At length the shadows fled from his resilient brain. He got up, turned off the lights, and went out, leaving all care behind him.

He had decided to have a good dinner and then ride up-town and see Myrtilla at her apartment.

On his way to dinner he got in touch again with the police over the telephone and suggested that, as Miss McCreevy had always liked to walk in Central Park, it might be well to have the park thoroughly searched.

CHAPTER X.

RIVAL BEAUTIES.

Not ten minutes before the arrival of Younglove had Myrtilla written her note to him and hurried away. Algernon was already dismissed when a man's voice engaged her on the telephone.

The man asked for Professor Younglove, but after some hesitation seemed content to accept the ear of his secretary on account of the professor's absence.

Then a woman spoke to her — the woman she considered as the soil beneath her feet—yet whom she had to deal with deferentially and, what was worse, whom she had to fear.

It was Sarah McCreevy.

"You Professor Younglove's secretary?" she asked almost petulantly, not that she meant to be, but because she was footsore and brain-weary.

"I am Miss Ashe, his secretary," Myrtilla answered with reserved contempt.

"Then for mercy sake tell him I'm going crazy!" poor Sarah entreated. "I have been wandering round the park all afternoon, and here it's dark and I have no answer to the letter I sent him and I don't know which way to turn.

"I didn't bring only a little money with me, and what will people think of me going to a hotel alone? And I'll have to stop disappearing and go back and face the music with my uncle unless the professor does what he said he would do and ought to have done two hours ago."

"Where are you now?" asked Myrtilla.

"In a drug-store somewhere in One Hundred and Tenth Street, I think. I am just cross the way from the park. Tell him I won't pay him a cent of what I promised unless he keeps his word; and, what's more, I'll make him give back that five dollars I paid him already, because it's all his fault that Ralph ran away from me in the first place, and I'll sue him for alienation of affections."

Myrtilla's eyes glowed with a strange light and one of her Elizabethan sneering smiles curled on her lips.

"The professor urges you to be calm," she said slowly, though her own brain whirled with an inspiration that had just come to her.

"Be calm! Is that all he has to say? I wonder if he'd be calm if he was in my shoes?"

"He could not remain here," Myrtilla went on, "because he is treating your uncle in order to bring him into the proper frame of mind toward your proposed marriage."

"You mean, he's trying to wean him away from that German butcher, or what?"

"He's trying to make him see things with a little understanding of your point of view, and so he told me if you called here or sent any word—"

"Sent any word?" Sarah interrupted sharply. "Wasn't my letter any word, and pretty plain at that, requiring an answer right away?"

"Yes, my dear!" Myrtilla cooed; "but there was no address on your letter. The nearest thing to an address was the statement that you had been roaming in Central Park."

Sarah was silent for a moment, and then confessed: "Honest, Miss Ashe, there are times when I think my uncle is right in calling me a fool. But then I've been so upset all day."

"I can't say any more on the wire," Myrtilla pursued, "except that the professor wants me to go to you at once. I will tell you everything when I see you."

"You mean you have news of Ralph?"

"Not yet, but we have no reason not to hope we shall have soon."

"Do you want me to go down to the office?"

"No, no — for pity's sake no!" Myrtilla said quickly.

Her scheme seemed better and better the more she thought ahead with it. Her dark eyes were dazzling bright. There was a note almost of gaiety in her voice.

"Well, what am I to do, then?" asked Sarah.

"You are to meet me at the corner of One Hundred and Sixth Street and Central Park West in half an hour. That's about the time it will take me to get there. Now, be a good, brave girl and all will be well with you."

"You're so kind I could kiss you," Sarah cried emotionally over the wire.

Myrtilla hung up her receiver, ran for her hat and coat, and scribbled the note for Professor Younglove the last thing before she left the office.

There was a cruel smile on her face. She laughed now and then on her way up-town; and again she would say repeatedly to herself, snapping her teeth together:

"It is fate, destiny, and she must not stand in the way of it!"

When Sarah saw her get off the car at One Hundred and Sixth Street she made a rush for Myrtilla and lifted her off the ground, embracing her and hugging her.

"What would have become of me if it wasn't for you, you dear darling woman?" cried Sarah.

Myrtilla yielded a traitorous kiss and squeezed Sarah's hand, saying:

"We must walk across town to Broadway and take a car there, for I live much farther to the north of the metropolis; and we must not be seen by any one who knows you."

Sarah clung to Myrtilla's hand as though she was a child, while in fact she would have made two of Myrtilla as far as height and frame go.

"Am I going to your house?" inquired Sarah innocently.

"Not so loud; yes," Myrtilla answered. "The professor believes this is the only safe way for you to disappear, because he may have to produce you at any moment."

"You said he went to see my uncle?"

"He's with your uncle now," Myrtilla said, walking faster, stimulated in her design by the complete trustfulness of the hot-headed, guileless Sarah. "We must not talk much until we get to my apartment. You never can tell who's listening to you in the streets or the cars."

This was sufficient for Sarah. There was not a word from then until Myrtilla stopped in front of her house, saying:

"This is the Darnley, where I live."

"Is that a park across the street?" Sarah inquired. "And why is it up so high in the air?"

"That is an ancient cemetery," Myrtilla replied somberly. "It's up high like that because all the place was a hill about here in olden times before the streets were cut through and leveled."

"Bless me!" Sarah ejaculated tremulously, "do I have to be disappeared across the way from a cemetery?"

"I live at the rear of this mansion and on the top floor," Myrtilla explained haughtily as they went in.

"Won't the hall-boy see me?" Sarah inquired timidly.

"There are no hall-boys and no elevators in this building, you must know," Myrtilla informed Sarah, as though Sarah had been guilty of gross impropriety in suggesting such an idea. "I abominate such modern nuisances. From two of my windows you will have a view of the lordly Hudson and the unparalleled Palisades. Thus you need not pine for lack of beauteous nature during your incarceration."

"What lovely big words you speak," Sarah declared admiringly, not paying much attention to what Myrtilla meant, but rapt with the way she talked and impressed with her queenlike airs,

which became more queenlike as soon as they came within her apartment.

Myrtilla displayed her collection of books on Sir Walter Raleigh, not one of which she had ever read. All she knew about him and Queen Elizabeth she had imbibed from her mother by word of mouth and had spent the rest of her time growing up in the Elizabethan tradition. She showed Sarah old English pewters and her historical prints, but Sarah's heart was taken and held by the kitchen.

"Oh, if Ralph and I could only be married and have a dear little flat like this!" Sarah cried. "I'd cook and bake for him the whole day long!"

Myrtilla tossed her head and her teeth gleamed under her smiling lip; but she said very sweetly:

"Sarah—you must let me call you Sarah—I'm afraid you will have to be content with a slice of cold joint and tea to-night, because it would not be prudent for us to risk being seen in a restaurant."

"That will be fine," Sarah voted enthusiastically. "You know I'm sick of restaurants and the boarding-house, and I said to myself over and over again once Ralph and I got married we would never—never—eat in a restaurant again."

"Let us eat something first," Myrtilla counseled in a tone rather ominous, "and then we'll discuss that gentleman."

Though it was unpleasant to hear Ralph referred to as "that gentleman," Sarah took no offense, believing it was merely Miss Ashe's manner of speech.

But when they were seated after supper in the front room, with two shaded candles on a little round table between them, and Myrtilla, eyes and teeth gleaming, as if she would transfix and gobble simple Sarah at one and the same time, there came back to Sarah the strange ring in Myrtilla's voice as she said "that gentleman."

"It is hard for me to do it," Myrtilla was saying now, "but I must. You have been deceived in that man."

Kindness made Sarah pliable as dough, but strike a spark of antagonism and all the courage of uncounted Scottish chiefs throbbed in her veins.

"Ralph deceive me? Ralph deceive anybody?" she cried. "What rot you are talking! The poor dear never told a lie in his life. That's just what kept him sad and made other people sad and avoid him. He simply would tell nothing but the truth."

"In the first place," Myrtilla continued, steady and baleful, "Ralph Withington is not really his name."

"O-ho!" Sarah laughed and ran up a crescendo of giggles; "that's the best I ever heard."

"The man's real name is Walter Raleigh, laugh though you may," Myrtilla proceeded, tense and dramatic. "Several years ago in a beautiful city a thousand miles from here he was solemnly betrothed to wed a girl of his own class and station."

"Well—of all things!" cried Sarah, her face red with anger; "and I suppose you think I'm not good enough to get off at the same station he does."

"I mean rank, lineage," Myrtilla declaimed, rearing herself haughtily on her chair. "You must hear me out, and believe me as you will or not. He abandoned this girl not long after the betrothal, slipped away from his home in the night like a thief, changed his name, and came East. His coming to Professor Younglove to-day undid him. His villainy came to the surface. He knew there was no hope for him save in flight, and so"—Myrtilla's voice trailed down the steep—"he fled."

"I knew all the time it was that old Loso Younglove that got us into this mess," Sarah declared, smacking the table with the palm of her hand. "And now he has me on the run, too. See here, Myrtilla, I'm going to cut this disappearing act.

"If I had known that was why poor Ralph ran away I never would have done it. I would have faced my uncle and made him help me find the dear

fellow. Look at all the time I've wasted and nearly walked the legs off myself in Central Park. Where did you put my hat?" And Sarah stood up.

"What—you would trust him when he has abandoned—" Myrtilla was saying slowly.

"He won't abandon me. I know that, Myrtilla; and that's all any woman needs to know about a man."

"But suppose the other woman won't let you—that is, obliges him to abide by his betrothal, which was duly recorded and published?" said Myrtilla.

"Who is she? Where is she?" asked Sarah, squaring her shoulders and looking about as though the woman might be in hiding in the flat.

"That, of course, you'll have to find out from Professor Younglove," Myrtilla said. "Now, like a brave, dear representative of your sex, Sarah, sit down and be calm. Remember the Health Circle."

"I'll sit down, Myrtilla, but as for being calm you might as well ask me to stand on my head. What I want to know is whether the professor is working for me or for this other person?"

"He is working for you; that I can say positively," and this positively Myrtilla believed.

It was because she saw how determined Younglove was to bring the man who called himself Withington and Sarah together that she had the inspiration to put a spoke in his wheel by taking Sarah secretly in charge.

"If I can only see Walter long enough," she reasoned, "to talk with him sensibly and bring back all those far-gone days of bliss unalloyed, I'm sure he'll forget his mad act and all its consequences and return to the bosom to which he rightfully belongs."

"If you're sure he's working for my interest," Sarah remarked, as if speaking to herself, "then I suppose I ought to be content to stay here and await instructions. But I don't feel like it, and I wish you had kept those lies about Ralph to yourself, Myrtilla."

"It is much wiser to know why he ran away, my dear Sarah, than to be in the dark about him."

"I know that, and I'm grateful to you," Sarah admitted as she touched her eyelids suspiciously with a corner of her handkerchief. "When I think I used nearly to kill myself laughing at him, and ever since this morning my eyes are like two pumps. I know I wouldn't laugh if I saw him now."

She got up and went round to embrace Myrtilla.

"Forgive me, dear," she entreated; "I'm such a fool. But any woman is when she's in love. Some day you'll realize it yourself."

"Some day!" Myrtilla echoed, her eyes shining, her lip curved in the haughty sneering smile that she considered one of her ancestral accomplishments.

The situation was one to stir Myrtilla's romantic nature to the depths. She felt triumphantly that she was acting with a finesse and cleverness worthy of her Elizabethan lineage.

The poor, simple, hot-headed Sarah McCreevy had given herself into her power trustingly, without question. Myrtilla could keep her captive in the flat, under the circumstances, as safely as though she had her shut up in a dungeon on the English estate that she always envisaged as her ultimate residence.

Professor Younglove, in seeking out the man who falsely called himself Ralph Withington, would be playing right into her hand when he believed he was working only for the renown and profit of his Health Circle.

The buzzing of the door-bell gave sudden pause to Myrtilla's gloating reflections.

"Quick, quick, Sarah!" she whispered, taking the limp Sarah by the hand. "Nobody must see you here—no one! Not even my washerwoman. That's the professor's orders."

Myrtilla pressed the button of the door-opener in the kitchen and left Sarah shut up in that small room.

"It's the safest place for you, dear," she said.

"Can I wash the dishes?" Sarah asked. "I got to do something, I'm that nervous."

"Look at the evening paper and make no noise," Myrtilla advised. "If it's the washerwoman I won't be kept more than ten minutes. But don't come out of here or you will ruin all the professor's plans for your happiness."

Even if Sarah had had the least idea of doing anything but obeying Myrtilla's mysterious orders, she could not have gone very far. Myrtilla locked both bedroom doors and the rear door of the flat before going into the parlor.

There were two doors of solid wood and two rooms between her and Sarah. Pulling a heavy portière across the door between the first bedroom and the parlor, Myrtilla draped herself against it statuesquely for a moment, saying inwardly:

"My success is only beginning. I must be calm."

Poised and listening, she heard a light step coming along the hall and then a knock on the parlor door.

Myrtilla opened it at once.

"Good evening, Myrtilla," Professor Younglove greeted her, "and good health! I just had to come to see you for a moment."

Myrtilla noted that his habitual smile was weary, and that altogether his presence lacked the usual cheer and sprightliness.

"Welcome, professor," she said, and indicated a chair to him.

"You did not wait for me at the office. I was disappointed," he told her, and sat down slowly.

"The toil of the day, the medley of sensations and emotions, professor, were too much for me. You will understand that after all these years of hoping and striving to find him how great a strain I have been under."

"I've had a long, hard day myself," Younglove returned; "and the way things look now I don't expect to sleep much to-night."

"Then you have word of Walter—I mean, well, you know?"

"Not a word; nor of her either. You read the letter that came from her saying she was roaming about Central Park, did you not?"

"It seemed better for me to read it when you were not at the office. I felt I might be able to do something right off."

"I counted on that much intelligence and loyalty from you, Myrtilla," Younglove observed, and leaning forward in his chair murmured softly: "I count on a good deal from you, perhaps much more than I shall ever get. Yet, working along the curved line of the Health Circle, I tell myself I will, I shall succeed."

"Myrtilla, I never realized until today how fond I have grown of you. I've been absorbed in my devotion to humanity, not conscious, though subconscious of the fact all along that you were the dearest person of all humanity to me. Still I have been using every effort to recover this man who—well, who seems disinclined to marry you."

"Everything must yield before the destiny to which Walter and I were vowed solemnly so many years agone," Myrtilla declared in low thrilling tones.

"Do you expect to make him marry you?"

"He will listen to reason and the call of duty, professor. I shall persuade him back again to the dear, sweet being he was in adolescence, if only I can be with him long enough."

"You can't say I'm not doing my best to find him, though it's against my own interest, can you, Myrtilla?"

"I wonder," Myrtilla asked, coyly shaking the twinkling patent-leather toe of her shoe under the edge of her skirt; "and I have wondered whether you are not making these endeavors as much for that person, Sarah McCreevy, as for me?"

"I get all the blame for her disappearance," Younglove answered promptly. "Her uncle threatened to

put me out of business, hinted that I was all kinds of a faker. The old man is positively erratic in his vibrations. There was no way of handling him except on an intricate curved line."

The professor narrated the ruse by which he had induced Ezra and Mr. Swartz to go to Atlantic City.

"But he won't find her there," Myrtilla remarked, with a dawning smile. "You'll be worse off, I fear me, when he comes back."

"I felt I could get hold of her in a day or two. I think I can keep her uncle and his butcher away for that long. If she stays anywhere in New York we ought to get news of her and of Ralph Withington soon, because her uncle sent out a police alarm for both of them."

"A police alarm?" Myrtilla echoed with a shudder. "How inexpressibly plebeian."

"Oh, it's a still alarm," Younglove explained quickly. "The papers won't hear anything about it for a few days at least. The old man is no more anxious to get his own name or his niece's into print than you or I are to see ours."

"If he had any real family pride, or any family to be really proud of, professor, it seems to me he might have engaged a private detective agency."

"He does everything in jerks," Younglove told her, "and that's why I had to send him and his butcher off the field, or you and I, Myrtilla, would not be able to do anything without having him interfere."

"I must say," Myrtilla replied coldly, "that I am interested in finding only one person. I do not need to tell you who that is."

A loud knock on the hall door caused Myrtilla to start violently.

"My vibrations are all awry, I fear me," she sighed. "It is the dreadful day I've been through."

She was reasoning that the bell must have rung in the kitchen. Sarah had answered it with the door-opener. Would Professor Younglove suspect that any other person than themselves was in her apartment?

Meanwhile she had opened the door to see a messenger-boy.

"Is Professor Younglove here, care of Miss Ashe?" the boy asked.

"For you, professor," Myrtilla said, waving the boy within the room with a queenly gesture.

"Are you sent from the Hotel Radford?" Younglove inquired, taking the telegram and signing for it.

"Yes, sir."

Younglove gave the boy a tip, who vanished with a grin and a mumbled thanks.

"I left word with the night clerk at my hotel," Younglove explained while he tore open the message, "that if he heard from the police about Mr. Withington or Miss McCreevy he was to send a boy right up here, even if I should be gone, as I was going to return to the Radford straight from seeing you."

One glance at the night clerk's note was sufficient for Younglove. He handed it to Myrtilla, clapped his hands together and said with suppressed enthusiasm:

"Nothing but success lies inside the Health Circle. See for yourself!"

"It is the destiny of the Raleighs which cannot be evaded," Myrtilla droned solemnly, a glitter of rejoicing in her dark eyes.

Younglove warmed with admiration at her pose and her brilliant orbs; but the Raleigh-talk made his back ache.

"I have read it," she said, returning the note. "Night though it be, we must venture forth at once."

"What, you, Myrtilla?" Younglove queried, considering the note anew. "He says a police sergeant informs me that Ralph Withington and his dwarf companion are at the Hotel di Rocca in the Bronx. There's no charge against them, but the police think they can persuade them to stay where they are for a little while. Have you any idea where Kalima Avenue

and One Hundred and Sixtieth Street is in the Bronx?"

"Though we did not arrive at the Hotel di Rocca before dawn, still I should go with you, professor."

If the professor had only known what was going on inside Myrtilla's brain he would have understood that her greater worry than a night adventure into the Bronx was what she was to contrive as an excuse for leaving Sarah McCreevy alone in the apartment. How, also, was she to keep her there assuredly until she returned?

"The first thing to do, professor," said Myrtilla, taking things in her own hands as she had never presumed before to dare, "is for you to go out and hire a taxicab. This is all my affair, and I cannot think of letting you go to any expense in the matter."

She told him where he could find a taxicab station at which she had an account.

"If you bring the vehicle inside of ten minutes—"

"But, my dear Myrtilla," he protested, "this appears a most imprudent thing for you to do. Why not let me see the man first and talk to him? It'll be eleven o'clock before I get to the Hotel di Rocca."

"Each minute lost is like a day to me," she argued. "And suppose that McCreevy person should have located him before we do? Have you thought of that?"

"That's impossible."

"Impossible? Nothing is impossible to a—I must steady my vibrations. Quickly, professor, I entreat you," and Myrtilla held the door open for him.

"In ten minutes, then," Younglove agreed wearily.

If she must come, she would; and already his fertile mind had begun to frame a plan for recovering Sarah through the medium of Ralph Withington. How he was to do this he did not know; but he did know that he would have to do it somehow.

At this very moment the testy and irascible Ezra McCreevy and his practical friend, Swartz, who was bent on being back to his butcher-store first thing Monday morning, might be preparing to come to New York next day, having found no trace of Sarah at general delivery or any other place in Atlantic City.

Myrtilla steadied herself to face Sarah. She unlocked the first bedroom door. She slipped on her jacket and hat, noting that Sarah's things lay safely on the bed. She stowed them in one of her closets under several other garments.

She unlocked the door of the second bedroom and passed through hurriedly. She would tell Sarah that Professor Younglove was still in consultation with her uncle and Mr. Swartz at the Baxter boarding-house, where they were decided to remain until Sarah appeared there or was discovered.

Yet she had also some good news for Sarah. Professor Younglove had received a message about Ralph or some one who was said to look like him.

This message seemed to be worth investigation; and as Professor Younglove was about to stay with Mr. McCreevy, laboring on Sarah's behalf, he had instructed Myrtilla to follow up the message. In the mean time it was of the highest importance that Sarah remain in seclusion.

Some moments elapsed before Myrtilla was able to convince herself that all this elaborate preparation was waste of energy.

She gazed about bewildered. She tried the back door of the flat. The spring-lock was fast and also the key-lock. The key was in her pocketbook where she had put it after shutting Sarah in the kitchen.

No sign of Sarah was to be seen.

Myrtilla made another and more detailed search of the small kitchen. The window leading to the fire escape was bolted as it had been all day during her absence.

But the dumb-waiter door was open and the dumb-waiter was at the bottom of the shaft!

"The low, common thing!" Myrtilla said to herself, staring down into the blackness.

In the queenly Elizabethan aura that enveloped Myrtilla a dumb-waiter was a place only for tradesmen, janitors and sneak-thieves.

Sarah had escaped without coat, hat or gloves; and it was a chill night.

"A woman of her class is capable of anything," Myrtilla murmured half aloud, puzzled to fathom what sudden reason had impelled Sarah to flee.

She had apparently confided in Myrtilla completely; and seemed as content as it was possible to be in her refuge.

The doorbell rang. Myrtilla awoke to the fact that she was keeping Professor Younglove and the taxicab waiting.

"As you will, then, Sarah," Myrtilla said, addressing the dumb-waiter shaft with dignity; "but you can't come back even if you would."

Then, bolting the dumb-waiter door, Myrtilla hastened down-stairs to join Professor Younglove.

(To be continued.)

The "V" Force

by Fred C. Smale

I.

I EXAMINED the bar of metal closely.

Subsequent measurements showed it to be fourteen inches long, three inches wide, and three-quarters of an inch thick. On the broad surface, about the center, was engraved a circle with strokes radiating from it, possibly a conventionalized representation of the sun. Beyond this no marks were visible.

The metal itself, so far as I could judge, was a very hard steel with a curious ruddy iridescence on the surface, somewhat reminding me of the appearance of "shot" silk. When suspended between the fingers and thumb and struck sharply it rang with a clear bell-like note. Evidently there was no flaw in the metal.

"Do you believe it?" I asked, looking up from my examination.

Walter Surtees shrugged his shoulders.

"Twenty years' residence in the East," said he, "have taught me to believe many stranger things."

"But this," I protested. "A mere

bar of inanimate metal to have all the powers you ascribe—"

"Excuse me," he corrected. "I don't ascribe any powers to it—at least you haven't heard me do so yet — I have merely retailed to you the statement made to me by the Tibetan priest who gave it to me."

"Has it the ordinary magnetic properties?" said I. "But of course you have thought of that."

Walter Surtees smiled.

"Yes, I have tested it, but it doesn't even lift iron-filings. No, it isn't a mere bar-magnet, whatever it is."

"But that stuff about the 'periodic powers,'" said I. "If there is anything in it at all it must be permanent. I am inclined to think the whole thing is a fable. I dare say those artful priests were able to play some curious tricks with it. It's their business."

My friend looked queerly at me for a moment before he spoke.

"Well, to be frank with you," said he, "there is something supernormal about it. I haven't confined my experiments to poking it among iron-filings."

"What else, then?" I asked curiously.

"It shines in the dark, for one thing," he replied.

I laughed.

"Radium," I suggested. "Possibly it contains a minute quantity. But that wasn't what you were going to tell me. You would hardly call looking at it in the dark an experiment."

Surtees rose and went to the door of the room.

"You shall see for yourself," said he.

He opened the door and whistled softly. Presently a huge, gray cat insinuated itself into the room and rubbed affectionately against my friend's leg, purring gently the while.

Surtees closed the door and returned to his chair.

"Now watch," said he.

The cat followed him for a yard or two, then it seemed to grow suddenly uneasy. Its fur rose and its tail became enlarged.

In obedience to a sign from Surtees I placed the bar, which I was still holding, on the floor. The cat watched it as though fascinated and mewed plaintively. It now seemed more terrified than angry.

Slowly, as though against its will, the animal drew nearer with a curious sidling movement until at last it lay close to the bar, motionless and apparently exhausted.

"That is certainly queer," said I thoughtfully. "I say," I added, looking up sharply, "you're not playing any hanky-panky tricks, old chap?"

Walter Surtees shook his head gravely. He was watching the cat.

"There may be some odor clinging to it which we cannot ourselves detect," I suggested, "and which the cat can, and finds rather overpowering."

"I never knew an odor to affect a cat or any other animal in that fashion," returned Surtees. "This morning it only fluffed up and swore at the thing. Now it seems to be decidedly more impressed."

He rose and lifted the cat gently. Then he started and examined the animal closely.

"Why, it's dead!" he cried.

"Dead!" I echoed. "Nonsense!"

"Dead as mutton," repeated Surtees. "Luckily it is my own cat and not the landlady's. Poor brute! I was going to show you something else. The canary—"

"No, thanks," said I. "We'll spare the canary, if you don't mind."

After spending some time in futile examinations of both bar and poor pussy, we left the bar where I had placed it on the carpet and passed to some other of my friend's curios.

But it was of no use. That infernal bar fascinated both of us. At last Surtees muttered something under his breath, and picking it up, replaced it carefully in a leather case.

"You take good care of it," I remarked.

"It may resent neglect," replied my friend lightly.

"Look here, old chap," said I suddenly, "if I were you I'd take an early train to Brighton or Southend and chuck that thing off the end of a pier—leather case and all."

"I am waiting to see what will happen," he returned in a curious dull tone. "I intend to see it out."

"Is there nothing that will check its influence?" I suggested. "No antidote."

"Nothing opaque to it, so to speak. I have thought of that. I tried lots of things this morning. Glass, electrified and normal—silk, water, shellac, a score or other things. I even borrowed an air-pump from the science school yonder and tried a vacuum. No use, any of it."

"Didn't you learn anything of its nature from the man who gave it to you?"

"He simply told me that he had taken it from the robe of a fellow priest, whom he found crushed to death."

"Crushed to death! How?"

Walter Surtees shrugged his shoulders.

"Some sort of panic, I believe. There was a big crowd of fanatics at some shrine or other, and this man seemed to have got underfoot. The story was very vague."

"And he had this thing on him," said I, musingly looking at the case on the table.

Surtees nodded.

I rose, and as I did so I swayed suddenly.

"Hold up — what's the matter — dizzy?" exclaimed Surtees.

"It's that confounded juju of yours," I gasped, catching sight of a rather white face in the mirror. I pulled myself together and reached the door.

"I've found a better name for it than that," said Walter Surtees. "The 'V' force — the vital force, you know."

"We'll leave it at that," said I, feeling angry with myself and the mysterious drawing power which I still felt, though less strongly. "Call it what you like, but I repeat my advice. Get rid of it or it may play cat-tricks with you, and I touched the dead animal with my foot.

Surtees seemed preoccupied and scarcely replied to my "Good night."

I went slowly down the stairs with an uneasy feeling that I was leaving him to face some unknown danger alone. I hesitated and half turned back. Then I heard the piano. Surtees was playing one of his favorite *"Chants sans paroles."* I laughed to myself.

"Music hath charms," I muttered. "It may soothe even a steel bar."

Yet I could not shake off the memory of that poor brute of a cat and the mysterious suddenness with which death had come to it.

II.

Two days afterward I was at Bexhill on some business connected with property I had there. I found it necessary to stay the night, and as I was leaving my hotel for a stroll and last pipe before going to bed the boots handed me a telegram. It was from Surtees, forwarded to me from my town address. The message was brief but sufficiently disturbing. It ran:

> Come to Pelham Street at once. Urgent. SURTEES.

Finding it would be impossible for me to reach Pelham Street until well after midnight, I hastily wrote a letter, explaining my sudden change of plan and left it for the man with whom I had an appointment in the morning.

At first the matter of the bar did not occur to me, and, as Surtees was of rather an impulsive nature, I thought his desire to see me might have its origin in some legal bother connected with a certain troublesome brother of his, of whom I knew.

It was a dark, foggy night when I arrived at Pelham Street, and the raw mist seemed to penetrate to my bones. There was a faint glow in the window of Surtees's sitting-room—not bright enough to indicate that he was up and about—but more as though a bright, clear fire had been left burning in the grate. Then I remembered that he used a gas-stove, and was momentarily puzzled.

There seemed nothing to indicate impatience or anxiety on his part, and, as I had run out of tobacco, I decided to go on to the public-house at the corner—it was not yet midnight—and replenish my stock before seeing Surtees, who smoked a brand too potent for me.

I strode on past the house with this intent, when suddenly my legs became leaden and I felt as though I were battling against a strong head wind. Yet the murky stillness of the atmosphere told me that such was not the case. I strove against the unseen power which was holding me back, but with each step it grew stronger.

The street was deserted or my quaint struggles might have roused some doubts as to my sobriety.

As I paused in bewilderment a ragged tramp came shuffling along. As he passed me he gave a curious growl and staggered against the wall. With odd inconsistency I muttered "Drunk!" and, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stepped back to the door of Surtees's lodgings and rang the bell.

Getting no reply, I tried the door, found it unlocked, and, breathing slightly quicker than usual, I mounted the stairs and knocked at Surtees's door.

"Who is there?" asked a low, muffled voice, which I nevertheless recognized as that of my friend, and I answered sharply.

"Thank Heaven!" said the voice. "Come in—but take care—take care!"

I opened the door and beheld a strange scene.

Surtees lay in a huddled position on the floor. Close to his face — within twelve inches—was the bar. It shone with a dull radiance, which filled the room, and by its light I saw that Surtees's eyes were fixed upon it and slightly crossed as in a hypnotic trance.

As I stood momentarily in horrified surprise I became conscious of an almost overwhelming desire to grovel on the floor also. Something seemed to draw me forward and downward with compelling force. Surtees spoke jerkily and as a man struggling breathlessly with an opponent.

"Thank Heaven—in time—I hope!" he gasped, while I grasped the door-lintel and listened.

"Discovered — antidote!" he went on after a moment. "Direct sunlight —even daylight— weakens—nights— powerful—stronger each night— My Lord!"

He broke off with a scream.

"It—draws—life!" he moaned.

He had never turned his eyes to me once all this time, and he now collapsed limply by the side of the accursed bar.

"Look—out!" he whispered.

At first I thought he meant this simply as a warning to myself. Then his real meaning flashed upon me and, bracing myself up, I made determinedly for the window. I reached it in a staggering, drunken fashion and, moving the blind aside, peeped down into the street below, my head humming like a beehive the while.

Three figures, including a policeman, were loitering with apparent aimlessness directly beneath.

As I looked a stout man came hastening along. I caught sight of his purple, anxious face in the light of a lamp. When he came up he checked his pace abruptly and lurched aside. The policeman seized him and held him up, while the other two men seemed to look stupidly on.

The sound of the constable's gruff voice came faintly to my ear. Now came a hansom, driven rapidly. Di-

rectly beneath the horse reared up on its haunches. There were shouts and a crash of broken glass. The hansom had turned over.

The street all at once seemed full of people and a woman's scream rang out shrilly. I dropped the blind and turned aside.

"What does this mean?" I asked, and my voice shook. "Surely this devilish thing—"

Surtees turned his bloodshot eyes on me with an effort.

"I cannot check," he whispered hoarsely. "All—London—crushed—death! Crowd—mob—panic!"

"What must we do?" I cried.

"Big risk—"

I made a gesture of impatience, the movement turned to burlesque by the force which I felt dragging at every nerve and muscle. What could be worse than our present position?

"We'll beat it somehow," I said.

"Make—rush!" said Surtees faintly.

I had unconsciously crept to his side, and we spoke in whispers.

"What—how?" I said vaguely. I felt a leaden dulness coming over me.

Walter Surtees gave an odd, croaking laugh.

"A chase!"

"And if we cannot get away."

"Remember — priest of Llassi!" was his reply.

"Come, then," said I. "The sooner the better. I am the stronger — I'll take it."

"No," whispered Surtees promptly.

There was no time for argument.

"Let us carry it together," said I. "Your right hand—my left."

He nodded.

"Glove," he muttered.

I understood and drew off the thick glove from his left hand and placed it on my own.

"Now," said I.

"Ready!" he muttered between clenched teeth. We stretched out our hands together.

The bar seemed to leap toward us and there was a sound of impact as it met our hands, as though it were welded to us. I shuddered.

We leaped to our feet, a curious sense of power tingling through our veins. The spell seemed to have been broken.

Meanwhile, the sounds outside had risen to a roar, and the street was filled by a seething, panic-stricken mob.

III.

"THE back!" cried Surtees.

We dashed from the room, holding the bar between us. Our strength seemed irresistible. We moved as one individual, and even our unspoken thoughts seemed in unison.

We burst through the flimsy door leading to the back premises, carrying it clear off its hinges; and I afterward found that the jagged iron of one of these had caused a nasty gash in my shoulder.

I felt nothing then.

On we raced, through a yard and into a narrow lane. Then, without a word passing between us, we burst off like some quaint quadruped. For a few minutes we saw no one, then suddenly we found ourselves in a main thoroughfare—the Edgeware Road, I think, but am not sure.

It was now nearly one in the morning and very few people were about; but we were dimly conscious of curious swervings on the part of those we did pass, and presently we heard the pattering of footsteps behind us. We kept to the center of the road, which at that hour presented few obstacles. We could not have dropped the bar now even had we desired to do so.

Our pursuers seemed to be growing in numbers. They were horribly silent. There were no shouts—no cries to those ahead to stop us—only that fearsome patter of many feet behind.

We dived down a side street which took us into an open space—Norfolk Crescent, we found it to be afterward. It might have been the top of the monument for all we knew then. Appar-

ently our pursuers had received a check, but, even as we paused a second, the head of the procession poured into the crescent.

At the curb in front of one of the houses stood a motor-car—a long, low, gray machine.

"Quick!" panted Surtees hoarsely, speaking for the first time during our flight.

We literally flew to the car. The chauffeur was dozing in furs. As we came up he lurched sidewise and fell almost at our feet. We scrambled over him into the car, and, while Surtees seized the steering-wheel with his free hand, I jerked back the starting-lever.

Luckily, we both understood motors. The vision of a wild-eyed man, clutching vainly at the back of the car, danced momentarily across my vision. I reached back to fling him off, and a sea of fierce, gibbering faces seemed to glide smoothly away.

I looked round dazedly. We were on a broad road which appeared to stretch away into infinity.

Surtees sat beside me, his jaw set like iron, and his eyes glowing like live coals under his knit brows.

"Cannot we drop this infernal thing? It is like being handcuffed," said I.

I had no need to raise my voice. The car was almost noiseless.

"Try," said Surtees grimly.

But my hand felt paralyzed. I realized that I had no power over it. But I was desperate. It seemed ridiculous that I should not be able to conquer this mere piece of metal.

Lowering the bar, of course with Surtees's hand as well, I placed my foot upon it and we wrenched our bodies back suddenly.

I groaned with pain. Half the flesh seemed torn from my hand—but we were free and our tyrant lay at the bottom of the car.

"Shall I kick it out?" said I.

"No—no!" replied Surtees. "The sea!"

I understood. He meant to give this thing effectual burial.

I leaned back and laughed a little. I was just beginning to realize what we had done and were doing.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Great Bath Road," he answered.

"But the sea!" I exclaimed. "Why not the Norfolk or Sussex coast?"

"I didn't stop to think it out," returned Surtees dryly.

"Then we must go on—"

"Until dawn."

"And then—"

"Relief and freedom," said Surtees, his eyes fixed on the road before him.

The houses were thinning now and there were no lights. Fortunately those of the car were powerful.

"Well, we are free now," said I, "if it comes to that."

"Try to rise," was Surtees's comment; "only don't fall out."

I seized the side of the car and strove to raise myself from the seat. It was impossible and I sank back in renewed dismay. It was as though we were bound down by iron bands.

"Sunlight the only antidote." My friend's words flashed through my brain. Truly, we must go on—until the dawn.

"Is there petrol enough?" I asked.

Surtees shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope so."

"Where are we going?"

"Devon or Cornwall. What is the time?"

My watch had stopped, but just then we heard a bell somewhere give a solitary stroke.

"One," said Surtee. "Sunrise half past six or thereabouts—over five hours."

The effects of our violent exercise were passing off, and after binding up Surtees's wounded hand as well as my own I busied myself with hunting out the rugs which had been considerately left in the car. I found no goggles or vizors, and as the roads were in perfect condition, neither muddy nor dusty, we had no need of such.

We had met very few vehicles. A belated four-wheeler or two and one other motor were all, and we were going at too great a speed for the bar to have any effect on those.

When we overtook anything, however, it was different. This only happened once—between Slough and Maidenhead. On a long stretch of road we rapidly overhauled the red light of another car, and as we came within thirty yards or so it suddenly slackened speed so that we almost dashed into it.

We swerved aside and dashed by. The other car seemed to leap at us and the occupants to tumble together of a heap. I set my teeth and held tight, but we just managed to clear them. Only our great speed saved them and us from what would no doubt have been a particularly complicated smash-up.

It must have been a very mystified party of motorists that we left behind, but we never learned that any one of them was hurt. Fortunately, throughout the whole of our journey the experience was not repeated.

I need not detail the entire course of that trying journey. We got no chance of bite or sup.

Luckily the car held out, and the gray light of dawn overtook us on the north coast of Cornwall, where we drew up at last somewhere between Padstow and Newquay, near the edge of high cliffs directly overlooking the sea.

Our red-rimmed eyes looked out from pallid, dust-begrimed faces over a slate-colored expanse of waters. We were cold and faint with hunger.

With an effort I managed to drag myself from the car, but was for some minutes unable to stand. Natural stiffness seemed all we had to contend with now. True, our limbs seemed leaden and we lurched drunkenly against the side of the car; but presently we realized that the dread power of the bar was almost if not quite vanquished.

What would not we have given for a flask of brandy or even hot coffee—tea—anything to ease our parched throats and warm our chilled blood!

Presently the ruddy rim of sun shot over the horizon to our right, and Surtees, staggering to the car, rolled back the rugs and seized the bar recklessly. He held it to the ruddy beams of the rising monarch which were struggling through the wintry morning mist.

He gave a crazy, chuckling laugh. Then his face changed and a furious expression came over it.

"Curse it!" he cried, and, turning seaward, he drew back his arm and flung the bar with all his strength far out over the dull-gray waters.

We could not discern the tiny splash where it fell some twenty or thirty yards from the shore and in, as we afterward ascertained, about twenty-eight fathoms of water.

We stood gazing dumbly for a moment. Then we realized that we were at last rid of our ghastly incubus and we danced on the grassy sward like lunatics.

"Sorry for the fish," said I.

"Whatever the infernal thing can do," said Surtees, "it can't rise from the sea."

We turned to the car and our eyes met. Surtees laughed rather grimly.

"We are in for trouble," said he.

"On the contrary, we are just rid of it," I returned lightly. "We have only to explain—"

I paused, and Surtees laughed again.

"Who will believe?" said he. "No—we must clear out. The machine is useless to us now. There is no petrol. We must leave it here."

I stood doubtfully and was about to make some suggestion, I know not what, when a glance seaward drove the blood from my face afresh.

"Look—look!" I cried.

At the spot where the bar had sunk was a huge mound of water like a gigantic wave. The surface of it was white with foam, and though it was as yet in the shadow of the cliff I thought I could discern something writhing and leaping therefrom.

Walter Surtees and I gazed spellbound. A sea-fog was rolling in rapidly, growing denser every moment, and ere it blotted the great tossing wave from our view, I fancied I saw a terrible, scaly head arise from the turmoil —a hideous monster with wildly whirling tentacles and ghastly, wide-open eyes.

Then the fog hid all. We lingered no longer, but turned and ran wildly, whither we knew not—anywhere away from that awful nightmare.

We escaped all awkward inquiries more by luck than anything else. We found ourselves possessed of a few pounds in cash, enough to take us safely to Falmouth and thence to Jersey and France, where we lay *perdu* for a while, easily reenforcing our funds by means of letters to our bankers.

The English newspapers were particularly interesting to us during the next few days.

We read how the Hon. Stockwood Ridgeway's motor-car had been found deserted on the Cornish cliffs; of the mysterious happenings in the neighborhood of Pelham Street, W., and of the no less inexplicable slaughter of fish near the coast where the car was found, some hundreds of tons being cast up on the neighboring sands every tide for some weeks following; but a convenient theory of submarines accounted for the last named, and, curiously enough, the "riot," as it was termed, in Pelham Street, of which, after all, a few broken limbs were the worst results, was never connected in any way by the press with the "hiring" of the car.

I suppose our exit by the back door and dash down the lane broke the link which might have somewhat enlightened the public. Yet what more would they have learned?

What do even Walter Surtees and I know, after all? Where is the accursed bar now?

Walter Surtees suggests that some ill-advised saurian has swallowed it and borne it off to spread calamity in other climes when its periodic power shall return.

I have sometimes wondered whether this story may not contain a clue to the fatal and unaccountable deviations of ships from their correct courses when near the Cornish coasts.

However, here my story ends, as far as I know it.

I hope it may never have a sequel.

ANIMAL EXISTENCE.

By Percy Watts.

THERE are a number of us creep
Into this world, to eat and sleep;
And know no reason why we're born,
But only to consume the corn,
Devour the cattle, fowl, and fish,
And leave behind an empty dish.
The crows and ravens do the same,
Unlucky birds of hateful name;
Ravens or crows might fill their places,
And swallow corn and carcasses.
Then if their tombstones, when they die,
Be n't taught to flatter and to lie,
There's nothing better 'twill be said
Than that "they've eat up all their bread,
Drunk up their drink, and gone to bed."

Her Forbidden Knight

by

Rex T. Stout

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

LILA WILLIAMS, telegraph-operator at the Lamartine, New York City, is the object of devotion of a group of men called the "Erring Knights." They are—Dumain, a palmist and clairvoyant; Tom Dougherty, an ex-prizefighter; Bub Driscoll and Harry Jennings, actors; Sam Booth, a typewriter salesman; Billy Sherman, a newspaperman, and John Knowlton, whose business is not clear. Lila falls in love with Knowlton, but the Erring Knights, egged on by Sherman, tell her she must have nothing to do with him, for they suspect that he is passing counterfeit money. She sticks to him, however, and Knowlton, impressed with her devotion, swears to himself to break away from his evil ways. Sherman, however, is bound to ruin him, and sets the law on his track. Lila learns of Knowlton's danger and flies to his apartment. Their interview is interrupted by a battering on the door and a demand to open in the name of the law.

Knowlton is arrested. Lila, however, succeeds in disposing of the counterfeit money which he happens to have on hand. She is shadowed by Sherman, who assumes that she is guilty, and thoroughly frightens her. From Sherman she is rescued by Dougherty and Dumain. When these latter realize how devoted she is to Knowlton they agree to get him out of jail and prevent his conviction. The Erring Knights pool their little cash, each individual taking fifty dollars, and seeking to make by gambling sufficient money to get legal talent for Knowlton. All lose except Dougherty, who at roulette makes three thousand five hundred dollars.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL TOGETHER.

WHEN Lila reached the lobby of the Lamartine at nine o'clock on the following morning she found the Erring Knights already assembled in their corner.

For a moment she forgot everything else in her surprise; she had thought that nothing less than the end of the world could possibly have roused these gentlemen of leisure from their beds at so early an hour.

Dougherty hastened over to her desk and demanded to know why she had left her room.

"Why not?" Lila smiled. "I feel

all right, really. And, anyway, I had rather be down here than up there alone. Did you see him?"

The ex-prizefighter grunted an affirmative and proceeded to give her a detailed account of his conversation with Knowlton on the previous morning. He ended by saying that they had engaged a lawyer, and that the sinews of war in the sum of three thousand dollars had been entrusted to Dumain as treasurer.

"But Mr. Dougherty," Lila exclaimed, "we can't possibly use that! I thought — you see, I have saved a little—"

Dougherty interrupted her:

"Now see here. We're doing this, and you've got to let us alone. Anyway, it's not really costing us a cent. I won't explain how, but you can take my word for it.

"Everything's all right, and you don't need to worry, and for Heaven's sake don't begin any of that stuff about you won't take this and you won't take that. If we're going to help you we've got to help you. What did you think I meant yesterday morning—that I was going to carry a note to Knowlton and then go home and sit down with my fingers crossed?"

Whereupon, giving her no time to answer, Dougherty turned and rejoined the others across the lobby.

This was the beginning of a campaign which lasted a little over a month.

The duties of the Erring Knights were varied and arduous. Each morning one of them conducted Lila to the hotel, and took her home each evening, this escort being necessitated by the fact that Sherman had twice accosted her on the street. He had also called at her home, but there was no necessity for a male guardian there. Mrs. Amanda Berry was a legion in herself.

Dougherty was the official messenger between the Lamartine and the Tombs. At first Lila had insisted on going to see Knowlton herself, but he had begged her to spare him this final humiliation.

The prisoner wrote:

> I long to see you; you know it; but it is enough to have the picture of this place imprinted on my own memory—I can't bear that you should see me here.
>
> Whatever your imagination shows you it cannot be as dreadful as the reality. If I obtain my freedom I shall not feel that I have cheated justice. Heaven knows I could not pay more dearly for my crime than I have already paid.

Knowlton stubbornly refused to allow his lawyer to procure his release on bail. The lawyer said he was quixotic; Dougherty used a stronger and commoner term, but they could not change his decision. He gave no reasons, but they understood; and the lawyer, who was at least as scrupulous as the average of his profession, declared to Dumain that for the first time in ten years' practise he was defending a guilty man with a clear conscience.

As for the case itself, it appeared to be by no means simple. The fact that they had no knowledge of the evidence held by the prosecution made them uneasy, and they bent their efforts mainly to attempts to discover its nature.

There was no danger, they found, from Red Tim, who had got away safely the night before Knowlton's arrest. And he was the only one of the gang whom Knowlton had ever seen or dealt with.

The evidence which the lawyer feared most was that concerning any specific operations, and in relation to the wallet which Knowlton had missed the day following the fight in Dumain's rooms. Knowlton suspected Sherman, but thought it possible that he had lost it on the street.

"Well," said the attorney, "the best we can say is that we're on our guard. We must keep our wits about us and fight it out in the court-room. We won't know much about what they know before the day of the trial. It's

a fight in the dark for us; but remember, they have to furnish the proof."

Dougherty was openly optimistic. After winning a one to thirty-five shot on the number of Knowlton's cell—he had recited the tale to the prisoner with great gusto—he refused to believe that their efforts could possibly culminate in anything short of glorious victory.

"Think of it; just think of it," he would say to Knowlton in a tone which partook of awe. "He drew the blooming number out of his hat—that was the first shot. Then he plays it single, and wins—that was the second. Why, we can't lose. We'll beat 'em both ways from the middle."

"Thanks, old man; I hope so," Knowlton would reply.

Thus three weeks passed by and found them marking time, waiting for the day of the trial. Dougherty spent the better part of two days seeking for Sherman, but without success. They had heard nothing from him, save the times he had accosted Lila on the street, nor seen him since the morning in Lila's room.

"He's surely round somewhere," said Dougherty to Dumain as they met in the lobby one morning. "In fact, I know he's in town, because he's still got that room on Thirty-Fourth Street. But I can't get in, and I can't get him either going or coming."

The little Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and glanced across the lobby where Lila sat at her desk talking to a man who had just approached—probably a customer.

"Bah! Let heem alone. So long as he ees not bother Mees Williams that ees all we want."

"It's not all I want," said Dougherty. "I want to punch his face, and I will. He's a low-down, dirty—"

He was interrupted by a call:

"Mr. Dumain!"

The voice was Lila's. They turned. She was standing in front of her desk, her face very white, holding in her hand a sheet of printed paper. Dumain hurried over to her, gave one look at the paper which she thrust at him with a trembling hand, and called to Dougherty.

The ex-prizefighter crossed the lobby:

"What is it?"

"Look!" Dumain held the paper before him. "A what you call eet—subpoena—for Mees Williams! *Mon Dieu!* Eet is all up!"

"Shut up," growled Dougherty, taking the subpoena. "Do you want the whole lobby to know about it? You get excited too easy."

"But what am I to do?" faltered Lila.

"Be a sport. Don't let 'em floor you with a little thing like this. They want you for a witness, do they? It's a good job. I'd advise you to take it."

Lila gazed at him, amazed at his levity concerning what appeared to her to be the destruction of all their plans.

Dougherty read over the subpoena with a smile.

"The fact is," said he, "that I'm surprised they didn't spring this before. I've expected it all the time.

"Sherman knew all about your being at Knowlton's rooms—he told me and Dumain—and what's more, he told us that he'd told the Secret Service about you. Now, why did they hold off so long? That's the only part I don't like."

"But what am I to do?" Lila repeated.

"There's only one thing you can do—go on the stand."

"But Mr. Dougherty! Don't you see? They will ask me about that night, and about the—the money. And he will be convicted."

Dougherty appeared to be greatly surprised.

"And how so? Let 'em question you from now till doomsday and what will they find out? Simply that you went straight home from the hotel and spent the evening in your room reading 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The only one they'll have against you is Sher-

man, and if a jury wouldn't rather believe you than him I'm a liar."

Still Lila did not understand. She protested:

"But I didn't spend the evening in my room."

"Don't you think I know it? I'm talking about evidence, not facts. As far as the jury's concerned you did."

Lila gazed at him in horror.

"Do you mean I'd have to lie?"

"Well, that's a pretty strong word," said Dougherty, "but you can call it that if you want to."

"But I couldn't—I couldn't!"

"You'll have to."

Lila looked at him:

"No. I know I couldn't. If I am a witness, and they ask me about—that evening, I couldn't tell them anything but the truth."

It was the tone rather than the words that caused Dougherty to force back the protest that came to his lips and convinced him of its uselessness.

Here was an obstacle, indeed! And utterly unexpected. Dougherty was not up on feminine psychology, and he couldn't understand how a girl could do for a man what Lila had done on the night of Knowlton's arrest, and then refuse to lie for him.

"Besides, it would be useless," Lila was saying. "I think it was Mr. Sherman who saw me, but it may not have been. Some of the others may have seen me also. And now I remember: the man they left in the room did see me as I passed the door. He might not recognize me, but how can we know? And if he did—"

"All right," Dougherty interrupted; "then there's no use talking about it. We're in a he—we're in a mess; but we'll find a way out, somehow. Dumain, find Driscoll and Booth. I'll get Jennings. Leave it to us, Miss Williams. Don't you worry about that thing"—pointing to the subpœna—"for a minute. Hurry up, Dumain!"

And ten minutes later the Erring Knights, five strong, were assembled in their corner, holding a council of war over this new and dangerous complication.

Booth was ready to throw up the sponge.

"What's the use?" he demanded. "They've got him fifty ways from breakfast. And this thing finishes it. If Miss Williams goes on the stand and tells what she knows, he doesn't stand a chance."

"You don't say!" observed Dougherty ironically. "What's the matter—cold feet? And what do you think we're here for? It's up to us to fix it so that she don't go on the stand."

"Tell me one thing," said Driscoll. "Why haven't they arrested her?"

"Easy enough." This from Jennings. "Because if they did they couldn't force her to testify against Knowlton, and they couldn't force Knowlton to testify against her. They figure that one is better than none."

"Come on, boys; talk business." Dougherty pulled Jennings down on the lounge and glared at Booth. "We have enough trouble as it is, without trying to figure out why we haven't got more."

But their wits refused to work. No one had anything to suggest that was worth listening to, unless it was Driscoll, who was strongly in favor of avoiding the subpœna by the simple expedient of running away from it.

"The trial is only four days off," said he. "Convey Miss Williams to some safe and sheltered spot till it's over, and let Knowlton join her there."

"But then there'd be a warrant out for her for contempt," Jennings objected.

"Well, you can't have everything," retorted Driscoll.

Dougherty told them to wait a moment and crossed the lobby to Lila's desk. Soon he returned, shaking his head negatively.

"She won't do it," he announced.

"She's darned particular," growled Booth. "What *will* she do?"

But the ex-prizefighter stood up for Lila:

"No, you can't blame her. She looks at it different from us. We'll have to think up something else."

There was a silence. Driscoll lighted a cigarette, offering one to each of the others, and soon the corner was decorated with spirals of smoke. Finally Dumain spoke, for the first time.

"I tell you," said he, "as soon as you feenish this foolishness, what I will do. You know nozzing. I weel ask Siegel."

"And what can he do?" demanded Driscoll. "He'll want to fix up an alibi for her, and she won't stand for it, and then he'll try to bully her."

But the others signified their approval of Dumain's suggestion, especially Dougherty, and the little Frenchman was soon on his way downtown to the attorney's office, while Dougherty left for his daily visit to the Tombs.

Driscoll strolled over to Lila's desk and told her that Dumain had gone to consult their lawyer.

"But he cannot help us," she faltered. "There is nothing I can do, is there, Mr. Driscoll? Tell me."

"You can keep up your courage," returned the young man. "As Tom would say, be a sport. And this Siegel is a shrewd man; he'll get us through safely, never fear. Dumain ought to be back before noon."

But Lila was completely terrified, and refused to be reassured. The formal phraseology of the subpœna had impressed her with the power of the law; it seemed to her to smell of courts and prisons; and her woman's mind was affected more by the document itself than by the very real danger it threatened.

Throughout the remainder of the morning she sat with her eyes glued on the entrance to the lobby. At eleven o'clock Dougherty returned from the Tombs with a note from Knowlton, but an hour later the little Frenchman had not arrived. Lila put on her hat and coat to go to lunch with a heavy heart.

The day was one of brilliant sunshine, with a saucy, freshening breeze coming in from the bay. Lila ate little and hurriedly, then strolled along the walks of Madison Square.

The grass plots were beginning to turn green, and the trees were covered with brown, damp buds, and in the center of the square a gardener was raking the newly turned earth. The gladness of the approaching spring was in the air.

Lila found it intolerable. She returned to the Lamartine.

Dumain rushed to meet her as she entered the door.

"Mees Williams! I've been waiting for you. Such a plan! Zat lawyer ees a genius!"

The lobby was accustomed to Dumain, and paid little attention to his gesticulations and shrill, high-pitched tones; but Lila flushed with embarrassment as they walked to her desk. She felt that every one was in her secret, wherein she was unjust to the loyalty and discretion of the Erring Knights.

But this was nothing to the deep, rich crimson that flooded her cheeks as the little Frenchman, in low, excited tones, unfolded to her the plan of Lawyer Siegel. And with it came a smile, curiously tender, as Dumain expressed a doubt as to her willingness to act upon it.

He finished:

"You see, he don't know if you will do eet, and I am to telephone heem at one o'clock; so eef he must—"

"But I will," said Lila. "Oh, I will! But are you sure I won't have to testify? Are you sure?"

"Positeevely."

"Then — couldn't we do it to-day instead of to-morrow?"

"No," Dumain smiled. "Eet weel take till to-morrow morning to get zee bail for Knowlton. Dougherty ees down to see heem now. To-morrow afternoon eet will be—remember. I must go to see Siegel for zee bondsman."

And he trotted off, leaving Lila with

face still flushed and the shadow of a doubt in her eyes, but with her lips parted in a trembling, wistful smile.

But the plan of Lawyer Siegel, clever and effective as it was, nearly caused a disruption in the ranks of the Erring Knights.

For Dumain and Dougherty alone were in the secret, which they refused to divulge; and the three others strenuously objected. Booth and Jennings threatened, half in earnest, to go over to the prosecution and tell all they knew, while Driscoll made many pointed and cutting remarks concerning the source of the money they were using. But the little Frenchman and the ex-prizefighter were as adamant.

"It's Miss Williams's secret," said they, "and it wouldn't be fair to her to tell it. The fact is, she asked us not to."

This last was not true, but Dougherty knew they wouldn't ask Lila.

"And all we're good for, I suppose, is to sit round with our hands in our pockets," said Driscoll bitterly. This was on the day after the plan had been consummated. "You get Knowlton out on bail and don't show up in the lobby for a day at a time, and when you come back expect us to clap you on the back and tell you how well we like you. It's not a square deal."

"Now, listen here," said Dougherty; "don't be a sore-head. The trial is day after to-morrow; can't you wait that long? Besides, you fellows have had your share. You've been bringing her to work every morning and taking her home every evening, and, believe me, that's some job.

"And here's another. If Knowlton gets out—and he will—there's going to be a little dinner for him and Lila in Dumain's rooms Friday evening. The trial can't last more than one day. We'll leave that dinner to you and Booth and Jennings. When Dumain comes in this afternoon he'll give you the keys to his flat and all the money you need. Go as far as you like."

"For how many?"

"Seven. Us five and them two."

Driscoll grunted, and departed to consult with Booth and Jennings.

On Thursday evening, the day before the trial, Miss Williams was escorted to her home by Dougherty himself. She was depressed and nervous, and his repeated attempts to rally her spirits were unsuccessful. They dined at a little restaurant on Columbus Avenue, and from there walked to One Hundred and Fourth Street.

"Brace up," said Dougherty, as they stopped at her door. "This time to-morrow night you'll be ready to start on your honeymoon. Don't you like the idea?"

"What do you think he is doing now?" asked Lila, with apparent irrelevance. She had learned to talk to Dougherty as to a chum.

"Reading your letters," said the ex-prizefighter with conviction. "He always is. And now you go up and get to bed and sleep. None of this endless night business."

Lila was standing in the open door.

"I'll try," she promised, smiling. "Good night, and thank you. I'll be waiting for you in the morning."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRIAL.

"MAY it please your honor, Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury—"

The speaker was a United States assistant district attorney; the scene, a Federal court-room in the Post-Office Building on Park Row. John Knowlton, alleged counterfeiter, was on trial before twelve of his peers.

The room was old and dingy—the building itself has been called the ugliest in New York. The jury-box, the benches, the railings, were blackened by time and use; the clerk appeared to have been fastened to his desk for many years. A dreary, melancholy room.

The spectators' benches are by no means filled; most of the faces are

familiar ones. In a group at the right are Detective Barrett and his two men, with Billy Sherman. Seated side by side on the front row of benches are Driscoll, Booth, Dumain, Jennings, and Dougherty. Toward the rear of the room Lila is seen, and by her side—Mrs. Amanda Berry! There are some dozen others — hangers-on, sensation-seekers, and young lawyers.

Knowlton, who was seated by the side of his attorney and engaged in a whispered consultation with him, looked up quickly as the prosecuting attorney rose to address the court and jury. The clock on the wall pointed to half past eleven; ninety minutes had sufficed for the preliminaries, including the selection of the jury. Lawyer Siegel had proven extraordinarily easy to please, thereby earning the gratitude of the judge.

"May it please your honor, Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury—"

The assistant district attorney proceeded with his opening speech. He was a young fellow—perhaps eight and twenty—and he spoke with the earnest enthusiasm of youth, with forceful, sounding phrases.

The prisoner felt his cheeks burn more than once at their sting. He wound up with the assertion that he would produce sufficient evidence to convict ten times over.

Lawyer Siegel turned and whispered to his client:

"He didn't let anything out—he's a slick one."

Before Knowlton could do more than nod in response Siegel had risen to his feet and begun the opening speech for the defense. It was surprisingly short; it entered not at all into details, or even the nature of his evidence, and amounted, in fact, to little more than a general denial. But as he stated that the accused would not be called to the stand in his own defense Knowlton perceived a swift, almost imperceptible, expression of doubt and disapproval flit across the faces of the jurors.

As Siegel sat down the prisoner turned for a fleeting glance at Lila; she smiled at him brightly.

The prosecuting attorney called his first witness:

"James Barrett!"

The detective had little to tell. He identified Knowlton and gave an account of his arrest, dwelling pointedly on his flight to the rear of the flat as they entered.

Siegel, for the defense, did not cross-examine.

The second witness for the prosecution was Billy Sherman.

"What is your name?"

"William Sherman."

"Your business?"

"Journalist."

"Your address?"

He gave a number on West Thirty-Fourth Street.

There followed some questions concerning the length of Sherman's acquaintance with the prisoner and the amount of time he had spent in his company; then the prosecuting attorney asked:

"Did you ever see Knowlton pass, or offer to pass, counterfeit money?"

Instantly Siegel was on his feet with an objection.

"Sustained," said the judge.

This was the beginning of a battle royal between the two lawyers. Time and again the prosecuting attorney tried to make his point, approaching it from every possible angle; and time and again Siegel objected that the witness was incompetent to answer.

Finally the judge himself became impatient and addressed the assistant district attorney with some severity:

"Mr. Brant, this witness has not qualified as an expert. You must give up this line of questioning or dismiss him."

Siegel seated himself with a triumphant smile. The prosecuting attorney frowned and cleared his throat. Knowlton cast a glance over his shoulder at the spectators' benches and sent a smile to Lila.

Dougherty leaned over and whispered to Driscoll:

"I don't know what the deuce they're talking about, but that cagey little guy looks like he'd just stopped a swing on the jaw and was hanging over the ropes."

But young Mr. Brant had another cartridge in his belt. He asked that an exception be noted on the ruling of the court, then turned to the witness:

"Mr. Sherman, where were you on the evening of the 11th of December last?"

"At the rooms of Pierre Dumain, a palmist."

"Where are those rooms?"

"In West Twenty-First Street."

"What is the number?"

"I don't know."

"Who was there with you?"

"The defendant, Knowlton, and four or five others."

"What are the names of the others?"

"Tom Dougherty, Pierre Dumain, Bub Driscoll, Sam Booth, and Harry Jennings."

"What were you doing there?"

The witness hesitated a moment before he answered:

"Having a fight. You see—"

"No; answer my questions," interrupted the lawyer. "Were you fighting?"

"No, sir."

"Who was?"

"Knowlton and Driscoll. Knowlton knocked him out."

"And then?"

"Then Knowlton and Dougherty fought. It lasted ten or fifteen minutes and—"

"Now tell the court and the jury exactly what happened."

"Well, Knowlton was getting the better of Dougherty and had him up against the wall, when all of a sudden somebody threw a piece of bronze or something at Knowlton and hit him on the head. He dropped like a shot."

"Then what did you do?"

"I ran over toward the door, where Knowlton was lying on the floor, and so did the others. As I was standing near him I saw a wallet sticking out of his hip-pocket, and I knew they—"

"You mean Knowlton's pocket?"

"Yes. And I was afraid one of the guys might take it, so I stooped down when no one was looking and pulled it out of his pocket—it was nearly out already—and put it in my own, thinking to keep it for him. Dumain had sent somebody—"

Mr. Brand interrupted.

"Never mind the others. What did you do?"

"I waited till the doctor came, and when he said Knowlton's injury was not serious I went home. I believe Knowlton stayed at Dumain's rooms all night. When I got home I put his wallet away—"

"Why didn't you return it to him before you left Dumain's rooms?"

"Because he was still half unconscious. He was in no condition to talk to. Then the next afternoon, I think it was—"

"Aren't you sure?"

"Yes," said the witness, after a moment's hesitation, "it was the next afternoon. I took the wallet out of the drawer where I had put it away, thinking to take it round to Knowlton's rooms, and as I put it in my pocket I happened to look into it, just out of curiosity, and I nearly fell over when I saw it was full of counterfeit—"

Lawyer Siegel sprang to his feet:

"I object, on the ground that the witness is incompetent."

"Sustained," said the judge.

"Exception," said Mr. Brant.

The judge turned to the witness:

"Confine yourself to a recital of your own actions."

"Did you return the wallet to Knowlton?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

Sherman answered: "No, sir."

"What did you do with it?"

"I kept it a while, then I took it to Detective Barrett, of the secret service."

The prosecuting attorney took something from a leather case on the desk before him and, handing it to the witness, asked:

"Do you recognize that?"

"Yes," said Sherman. "It's the wallet I've been talking about."

"Is it the one you took from Knowlton's pocket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Inspect the contents. Are they the same as when you first saw it?"

There was a pause while the witness examined each of the compartments of the wallet, then he answered:

"Yes, sir."

"Everything the same?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Brant stepped forward and took the wallet from Sherman and handed it to the clerk of the court:

"Your honor," said he, "I wish to introduce this wallet as evidence, with its contents. I shall call an expert later to prove that they are counterfeit."

This was a blow to the defense which, though not entirely unexpected, appeared to be serious. The Erring Knights looked gloomily at each other, but forbore to speak.

Lila was scarcely breathing in the intensity of her anxiety, while Mrs. Berry patted her hand soothingly. The accused was whispering excitedly to his attorney, who listened with keen interest, nodding his head with satisfaction at intervals. The result of this conference was to appear later.

The prosecuting attorney asked his witness a few more questions, for the most part unimportant, then turned him over for cross-examination.

Lawyer Siegel rose to his feet. He had not an impressive appearance, but as he stepped directly in front of Sherman he shot at him a glance so severe and terrifying that the witness involuntarily recoiled.

The tone was no less severe:

"How long did you keep this wallet before you turned it over to Detective Barrett?"

Sherman's answer was low:

"About two months."

"Why?"

But Mr. Brant objected to the question, and was sustained.

Siegel resumed:

"You say somebody hit Knowlton on the head with 'a piece of bronze or something.' Who was it that threw that bronze?"

The witness was silent.

"Who was it?" repeated the lawyer.

Sherman stammered:

"I did."

"I see. Had you been fighting with him?"

"No."

The attorney was shouting his questions with great rapidity, giving the witness barely time to answer, and no time at all to think. Sherman was nervously grasping the arm of his chair.

"Were you standing very close to Knowlton when you threw the bronze at him?"

"No, sir."

"Across the room, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And as soon as he fell Dumain and Dougherty ran over and knelt down by him, didn't they?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Jennings stopped you when you started to leave the room, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

The questions were coming like the rattle of a Gatling-gun.

"And he forced you back to the corner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he went to help the others with Knowlton?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were over in the opposite corner alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when you found the wallet, was it in the coat or the vest?"

"The coat."

"Which pocket?"

"The insi—" Sherman began; then,

realizing suddenly what he was saying, stopped short with a look of horror.

He was trapped.

The reason for his previous story of having taken the wallet from Knowlton's hip-pocket as he lay on the floor could be found only in the tortuous channels of Sherman's treacherous brain.

Undoubtedly, he had thought to make his evidence stronger by making it appear that the thing had actually been taken from the person of the accused, and had anticipated the difficulty of proving that the coat was Knowlton's. And now he was fairly caught.

Siegel pursued his advantage relentlessly. He hammered the witness with questions, and Sherman stammered and grew red in the face with helpless anger, and finally admitted that his first story had been false. That was all Siegel wanted; he sat down with a smile of triumph; his forehead was covered with beads of sweat.

On redirect examination the prosecuting attorney made a valiant attempt to bring his witness out of the hole he had digged for himself, but in vain. Sherman was hopelessly confused; he made matters worse instead of better, and ended by refusing to answer at all. He was dismissed by the court with a reprimand, and at a sign from Mr. Brant seated himself on the front row of benches.

For a few moments the progress of the trial was halted by a conference between the prosecuting attorney and Detective Barrett, while Knowlton whispered animatedly to his counsel and the faces of the Erring Knights beamed with joy.

"What did I tell you?" said Dougherty to Driscoll *sotto voce*. "Didn't I say he was a slick guy?"

Then the prosecuting attorney turned to face the court-room:

"Miss Williams, please take the stand."

There was a silence. No one moved. Knowlton kept his eyes fastened on the desk before him. Three of the Erring Knights glanced accusingly at the other two.

Mr. Brant, whose temper had not been improved by the discrediting of Sherman's testimony, looked directly at Lila, who had remained in her seat, and repeated his question.

"Will you please take the stand?"

Lila rose and faced him.

"Do you mean me?" she asked.

"Yes. I called your name. Take the stand."

Lila did not move.

"I beg your pardon, but you did not call my name."

"Aren't you Miss Williams?" said Mr. Brant testily.

Lila answered clearly:

"No."

The attorney started with incredulous surprise. Driscoll, Booth, and Jennings looked round at her in amazement, while Dougherty and Dumain smiled in their superior knowledge. Knowlton did not move.

Sherman sprang from his seat and, crossing to the side of Attorney Brant, whispered excitedly:

"That's her, all right. They're up to some trick. Call her up. She won't lie on the stand."

But Mr. Brant shook him off, and after a moment's hesitation again spoke to Lila:

"Then what is your name?"

Lila sent a single fleeting glance to the prisoner, who had turned in his chair to face her; then looked directly at the questioner. Her answer was low, but distinct and half triumphant:

"Mrs. John Knowlton."

Then she sat down and buried her face in her hands; and, as everybody stared at her in consternation, surprise, or wonder, Lawyer Siegel rose to his feet and addressed the listening judge:

"Your honor, this woman is the wife of the accused; and, therefore, may not be called as a witness by the prosecution. Your honor sees that she is in distress. May I ask that counsel

be instructed not to question her further in court?"

But Mr. Brant turned on him angrily:

"Your proof! Show us your proof!"

"Of course," said the other, taking a paper from his portfolio, "I expected you would demand it; I do not expect courtesy from you, sir." He handed the paper to the judge. "That is the marriage certificate, your honor."

There was a breathless silence throughout the room while the judge adjusted his eye-glasses and inspected the large, stamped document. He looked at the date and the signatures, and glanced at Attorney Siegel searchingly; then turned to Lila and asked her to step to the witness-stand.

"I object, your honor—" began Lawyer Siegel, but the judge stopped him with a gesture.

Lila was in the witness-chair. The clerk of the court administered the oath. The judge turned to her.

"Are you the 'Lila Williams' mentioned in this certificate?"

Lila barely glanced at it before answering:

"Yes, sir."

"Are you the wife of the accused, John Knowlton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you wish to testify for the people in this action?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all," said the judge; "you may go."

Then, as Lila glanced at him gratefully and rose to return to her seat, he handed the certificate back to Lawyer Siegel and turned to speak to the prosecuting attorney with judicial calmness:

"Call your next witness, Mr. Brant."

But the trial had become a farce; a huge joke — on the prosecution. Of his two chief witnesses, one had been discredited and the other disqualified; and Attorney Brant stammered in angry confusion that he had no others.

He recalled Sherman to the stand to give a recital of Lila's movements, as observed by him, on the evening of Knowlton's arrest; but Sherman could tell little, and it was easy to perceive by the expression on the faces of the jurors that the little he could tell was not believed.

Mr. Brant also called an expert, who testified that the bills in the wallet in evidence for the prosecution were counterfeit; then the prosecution rested.

The defense rested without calling a witness.

Then came the closing speeches.

Young Mr. Brant stammered and hesitated for a quarter of an hour, and, considering the paucity of his material, made a very creditable effort; but it was thrown completely in the shade by that of Lawyer Siegel, which may be given in full:

"May it please your honor, Mr. Foreman, and gentlemen of the jury: Without any desire to be flippant, I can only state that since I am confined to the evidence, and since there has been no evidence worth speaking of, I have nothing to say."

And five minutes later, without leaving their box, the jury returned a verdict of "Not guilty," and John Knowlton was a free man.

It was Lila who reached his side first, but the Erring Knights were not far behind; and Knowlton found himself the center of an excited, laughing group of faces filled with good-will and friendship and — one of them — with love.

In one of his hands he held both of Lila's, and gave the other to each of the Erring Knights in turn; but his lips were silent. Before all these faces, at that moment, he could not trust himself to speak.

"But I was so frightened," Lila was saying. "Oh, I was *so* frightened!"

"Bah!" said Dumain. "At what, madam?"

Lila's cheek flushed at the title, and Driscoll, observing it, put in mischievously:

"Yes; that really isn't very complimentary to us, Mrs. Knowlton."

"Oh!" said Lila helplessly, while the flush deepened.

"And now," said Dougherty, "where's that guy, Siegel? I want to ask him to come up to the dinner to-night. I wonder where— What? Look at that!"

He was pointing excitedly across the room. The others turned and saw Billy Sherman being escorted to the door of the court-room by two police officers in uniform.

"Probably some of his friends," observed Booth.

"No," said Driscoll; "it's more likely that little slip-up in his testimony. I believe they call it perjury."

At that moment Siegel approached the group.

"Come on," he called gaily; "they're going to clear the room. And I guess we'll be glad enough to go, since we don't have to leave any one behind. And, by the way, did you notice our friend, Sherman? He seems to be having a little trouble of his own. They just arrested him."

"What is it?" asked Booth. "Perjury? They certainly didn't lose much time."

"No. It isn't that. That was merely a lapse of memory. They came from the outside. I didn't hear what they said, but from the expression of Mr. Sherman's face I wouldn't be surprised if it was murder. We caught him prettily, didn't we?"

They had left the court-room and were standing at the head of the stairs in the corridor.

"Well, let's forget him," said Driscoll. "He was bound to hang himself sooner or later. Maybe he's done it already. Come on—everybody."

They moved down the stairs and out to the sidewalk, chattering and laughing, still nervous and ill at ease from the restraint and anxiety of the court-room.

Lined up along the curb were three big gray limousines.

"Now," said Dougherty, stopping in front of them, in the tone of a general marshaling his forces, "here's where we separate."

He pointed to the first of the limousines. "Dumain, you take this car with Knowlton and take him to your rooms. He'll find there what he needs.

"Can't help it, Mrs. Knowlton; it's only for an hour or two. Driscoll, you are to take Mrs. Knowlton to One Hundred and Fourth Street, and get her trunk and bags. The rest of you come with me. And remember: six o'clock at Dumain's rooms. No later. Come on, boys!"

"But what—" Knowlton began.

"Listen here," Dougherty interrupted sternly; "are you going to obey orders or not? Hereafter Mrs. Knowlton can boss you. It's our turn to-day."

In pretended fright Knowlton turned to Lila and bade her *au revoir* with a pressure of the hand, then sprang into the automobile beside Dumain.

"That's right," said Dougherty. "Here you go, Mrs. Knowlton. Help the lady in, Driscoll. Come on, Siegel, with us. What's that? Yes, you will —come on! All ready, boys? Let 'er go! So-long! Remember, six o'clock!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WESTWARD HO!

EIGHT gilt chairs with embroidered seats and backs surrounding a table covered with snowy linen and shining silver; four diminutive Swiss waiters with quick eyes and silent feet; roses everywhere—on the mantel, in vases on the table, clustered over the door, red and white; candles—hundreds of them —placed wherever there was an inch of space to hold them; such was the scene prepared by Bub Driscoll and his aids for the joy dinner in honor of Mr. and Mrs. John Knowlton, in that apartment on West Twenty-First Street which we have seen twice before.

Lila was escorted to the dining-room on the arm of Lawyer Siegel, after

an extended and heated controversy among the Erring Knights as to which of them should have that honor.

When it appeared that the matter was apt to be argued till the dinner was ruined, Siegel stepped in and settled the question by offering his services, which were gladly accepted.

Pierre Dumain, as host, sat at one end of the table; Knowlton at the other. On one side was Lila, between Dougherty and Driscoll; opposite them Booth, Jennings, and Siegel.

"What a shame!" said Lila. "I'm so excited I can't eat."

Driscoll observed:

"Now, that's just like a woman. For two months you've been as cool and collected as a cake of ice, while you've had enough trouble to scare an army; and now that everything's over, and you're just at the beginning of a lifelong siege of matrimonial boredom, you're so excited you can't eat!"

"I never did a harder day's work in my life," declared Dougherty, "and I'm hungry like a bear. What do you call this, Driscoll? I'm no bridegroom —I can't eat roses."

But he was promptly squelched by the master of ceremonies, and everybody talked at once till the soup arrived.

Never was gayer company. Lila was at first a little embarrassed at finding herself the eighth at a table with seven men, but that did not last long; no longer, in fact, than when Dougherty, at the finish of the fish, arose to his feet to give an imitation of Miss Hughes chewing gum, powdering her face, and waiting on three customers at the same time.

"She never did," declared Lila, when she could speak for laughing. "That's a slander, Mr. Dougherty."

"What?" exclaimed the ex-prizefighter. "I'll admit it's not true to life; it's too delicate and refined. Not that I don't like her; the Venus is a good sport. And if there's any— What's this?"

"Sweetbreads in tambo shell, *m'sieu'*," murmured the waiter.

After which Dougherty was silent— and busy—for ten minutes.

Then Lawyer Siegel related some of his court experiences, both humorous and tragical, and Dumain described the mysteries and secrets of the gentle art of reading palms, and Jennings explained that his contract with Mr. Frohman would probably not be signed till the following day, and Dougherty described his first prizefight with an animation and picturesqueness of language that left the others in a condition bordering on hysteria.

"There's one thing," said Driscoll, turning to Lila, "for which I shall never forgive you — that you didn't invite me to the wedding."

"Here, too," put in Jennings. "I call it snobbish."

"Where was it, anyway?" Booth wanted to know. "How did you manage it?"

Dougherty explained:

"Easy. You know we got Knowlton out on bail for one day. Well, he got a license and I got a preacher, and Dumain let us use his French parlor, and stuff was all off in fifteen minutes, But you may get to see a wedding, after all."

Dougherty glanced at Knowlton. Knowlton nodded. Then the ex-prizefighter continued:

"We all know that our friend Mr. Knowlton is traveling sort of incog. His real name is Norton, and that fact demands what you might call supplementary proceedings. The big show is on to-morrow, and if you treat Mrs. Knowlton right she's very apt to give you a bid."

"Hurrah!" shouted Driscoll. "In at the death is all I ask."

"What an expression!" said Lila. "Mr. Driscoll, I'm offended."

"I beg your pardon," said the gentleman gallantly. "I didn't mean it, I assure you. Waiter!"

"Yes, sir."

"If I order another bottle of white wine—"

"Yes, sir."

"I say, if I order more white wine—"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't bring it."

"Yes, sir. No, sir."

The table grinned, and made a concerted and valiant attack on the dessert, while Jennings and Booth accused each other with some heat of being the cause of Driscoll's order.

Presently Driscoll rapped on the table for attention, and glared fiercely at the disputants till he got it.

"Lady and gentlemen," said he, "I must ask your kind favor and indulgence. Unlike the rest of this proud assembly, Mr. Jennings and myself are workingmen. We earn our bread by toil."

Cries of "Hear, hear!" came from Jennings, while the others jeered.

"Howbeit," continued the speaker, silencing the interruptions with an imperious gesture, "we must be at our tasks by eight o'clock. It is now seven-twenty.

"I understand that Mr. Dumain has a surprise in store for us, and that Mr. Knowlton has kindly consented to make a speech. In the interests of equality and justice I demand that these ceremonies begin at once."

Applause, continued and vociferous, from Jennings. Booth and Siegel each grasped one of his arms and held him quiet. Driscoll turned to Dumain and demanded an answer.

"All right," said the little Frenchman, "I'm ready."

"What about it?" Driscoll turned to the others.

They signified their approval. Knowlton, who had been silent throughout the dinner, nodded. Dumain rose to his feet, pushed back his chair, and cleared his throat.

"About zee surprise," the little Frenchman began; "eet ees a pleasant surprise. We are here this evening—"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Jennings.

"Silence him!" ordered Driscoll. Booth and Siegel obeyed, and the speaker continued:

"I say we are here this evening because our hearts are glad for our friend Mr. Knowlton and our very dear lady—God bless her!—zee Lady Lila!"

"To her!" shouted Dougherty, springing to his feet and raising his glass on high.

"To Lady Lila!" came in a deafening chorus, while Lila rose to her feet, trembling and confused.

They drank the toast amid cheers and applause.

"And now," continued Dumain, when they had reseated themselves, "for zee surprise. I must go back a leetle, and I do not speak zee Angleesh so well, so you must have zee patience.

"About Knowlton eet ees—only hees name ees Norton. I can only tell what I know. From what Sherman and our very dear lady have say to me I add zis to zat, and I know nearly all.

"I know he was officer in a bank in Warton, Ohio, and zat money was missing, and zat our friend was what you call eet suspicioned. And about zis Sherman tol' me, and from what he look at me I theenk to myself, aha! Sherman know more zan he say.

"Well, I theenk very little about all zat—I nearly forget eet because we are all busy wiz trying to put Knowlton away from all. For many weeks I forget eet."

Dumain paused, glanced at his audience with the assurance of a man who holds a high trump, and continued:

"All zis we all know. Well. To-day I take Knowlton here to my rooms where ees hees trunk I brought. But he needs something — we go out. I stop in zee Lamartine to wait for heem —I go to zee telegraph desk, I go to zee cigar-stand, I go to zee front desk, and Geebson call me and say, 'Telegram here for a man named John Norton. Do you know heem, Dumain?'

"I say, 'Yes, I will take eet to heem,' and he give eet to me, and I open eet and read eet to make sure. What I theenk, eet ees for Knowlton. Right. Here eet ees."

He took a yellow telegraph-form from his pocket and waved it in the air. It was extra size—the telegram was a long one.

They shouted, "Read it!"

But Dumain tossed it to Knowlton, who, after reading it through, let it fall from his hands to the table and turned a white face to Lila.

"What is it?" Lila faltered.

Dougherty snatched up the telegram and read it aloud:

> "Mr. John Norton, Hotel Lamartine, New York. Alma Sherman has confessed all. I was a fool not to believe you, but come home. Her brother got the money. They have wired to the New York police. Come home at once. Letter follows, but don't wait for it. Wire me immediately.
>
> "FATHER."

"Oh!" cried Lila. "And now—and now—"

In the confusion that followed, while the others applauded and shouted and clapped Knowlton on the back, Dougherty had to place his mouth close to her ear to make her hear:

"And now what?" he demanded.

"And now," Lila answered, "he—he doesn't need me, after all."

The ex-prizefighter sprang to his feet.

"Ha!" he cried in a tone of thunder. "Silence! Shut up, you! Knowlton, do you know what your wife is saying? She says that now you won't need her!"

Another moment and Knowlton was at her side, holding her in his arms.

"Lila! Dear little girl! We shall go home—home—together. Darling! Not need you? Look at me!"

For the next five minutes the Erring Knights and Lawyer Siegel were occupied in the next room, chased thereto by Dougherty, who commanded them to make as much noise as possible.

Presently Knowlton's voice came:

"Come back here! What are you doing in there? I say, Dumain! Dougherty!"

They came through the door backward, in single file, and Lila was forced to laugh in spite of herself.

"That's better," said Dougherty approvingly. "This is an occasion of joy, Mrs. Knowlton. No tears allowed."

Lila smiled at him.

"But say!" put in Driscoll, as he lit a cigarette—Lila had long since commanded them to smoke—"do you know what? That's what they took Sherman for at the court-room!"

"They didn't waste any time," Booth observed.

"Oh, I know how he knew that," Lila was saying to Knowlton and Dumain, who had expressed their wonder at his father's knowledge of his address. "It was Mr. Sherman who told him."

"Sherman!" they exclaimed.

"Yes," Lila asserted.

Then she told them of the telegram Sherman had sent to the president of the Warton National Bank concerning John Norton, and Dumain and Knowlton hastened to inform the others of the fact that they owed the receipt of the telegram to the enemy himself, thereby doubling their joyous hilarity.

Then they surrounded Knowlton and demanded a speech. He protested; they insisted. He appealed to Lila for assistance; she commanded him to do his duty.

There was no escape; he motioned them to be seated, and began:

"Boys, I know this is no time to be serious—for you. You're having a good time. But you've asked me to talk, and to tell the truth. I'm glad of the chance to relieve my mind. If you don't like what I say it's your own fault. I know you're good sports, but there are one or two things I have to speak about.

"First, money. You've spent about sixteen hundred dollars on my defense, and you've given me a thousand for a stake. There's been nothing said about it—you've turned it over to me without a word—but I want you to

know that the first thing I'll do when I get home—when we get home—is to send you a check for the twenty-six hundred. Now, don't think I'm refusing a favor; it isn't that. The Lord knows I've accepted enough favors from you without your insisting on that one, too."

"Oh, of course, if you're rolling in wealth—" put in Driscoll.

"Then that's settled. I'm not going to try to thank you; if I talked all night I couldn't make it strong enough. Lila and I are going out West where they like to say you find nothing but good, clean Americans, and I've always thought the boast was justified; but wherever we go, and whoever we see, we'll never meet as good men, or as straight sports, or as true friends as the Erring Knights.

"Here's to you, boys! God bless you!"

Knowlton's voice was trembling so that he could scarcely speak, and his eyes shone with tears as he drained the glass and threw it on the floor, where it broke in a thousand fragments.

The following afternoon the bride and groom were escorted to the Grand Central Station by the Erring Knights. And there they received their reward if they had felt they needed any. For after Knowlton had shaken hands with each of them and arranged for a grand reunion when he and his wife should next visit New York, as they stood lined up at the entrance to the trackway, Lila approached Dougherty, who happened to be first, with a farewell on her lips.

He held out his hand. She ignored it, and, stretching on tiptoe, placed a hearty uncompromising kiss on his either cheek! And before he could recover she had passed on to Dumain and repeated the operation, and then to the remaining three.

In another moment she was walking down the platform by the side of the train with her arm through that of her husband, preceded by two porters loaded with bags and suit-cases and flowers and candy; and every now and then she turned to look back at the Erring Knights, who were waving their handkerchiefs frantically in unrestrained and triumphant glee. And then, throwing a last kiss from the car platform, while Knowlton waved his hat, they disappeared inside, and a minute later the train pulled out.

It happened, by a curious coincidence, that that train held two sets of passengers for the little town of Warton, Ohio.

In a day-coach, seated side by side, were two men. The face of one, dark and evil looking, wore lines of sleeplessness and despair and fear. The other, a small, heavy-set man with a ruddy countenance, was seated next the aisle, and had an appearance of watchfulness as he kept one eye on his companion while he scanned the columns of a newspaper with the other. William Sherman was going home to pay.

But a few feet away, in a Pullman, sat the man he had tried to ruin and the girl he had tried to wrong.

They were looking at each other, they felt, almost for the first time. Between them, on the seat, their hands were closely clasped together.

Thus they sat for many minutes, silent, while the train passed through the city, crossed to the west, and started on its journey northward along the banks of the glorious Hudson.

"Dearest," said the man in a caressing tone.

The girl pressed his hand tighter and sighed happily.

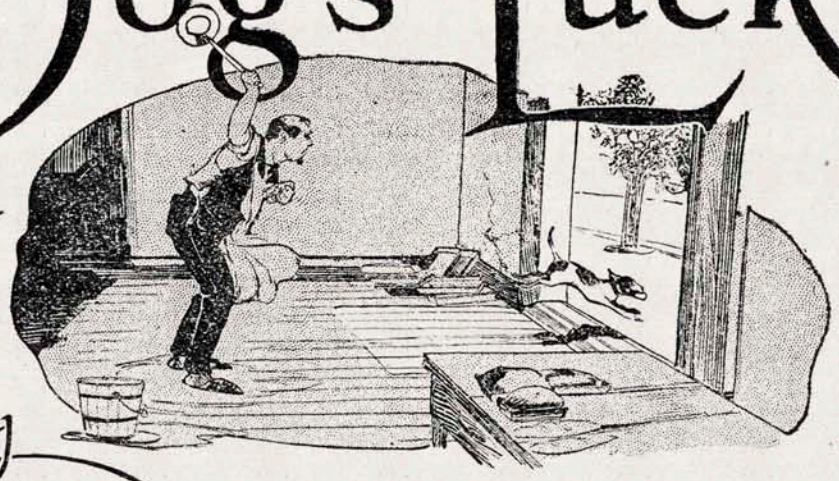
"They're good fellows," the man continued, "every one of them. And to think what we owe them! Everything—everything!"

"Yes," said the girl, "everything. We must never forget them."

But the truth was, as was clearly apparent from the tone of her voice and the melting of her eyes into his, that she had forgotten them already!

(The End.)

Dog's Luck



by Jack Brant

GYP had no particular objections to being abducted. He'd been abducted before.

That's because he was a yellow dog of anonymous pedigree, and yellow dogs of that kind have been considered more or less common property since the world began.

So when Big Bill, of the Reno Musical Comedy Company, caught him at the back of Charlie Sands's hot-dog wagon in Topeka, and brought him along as an addition to the company, there were no objections from Gyp. The only objections came from the said Charlie Sands, owner of the said hot-dog wagon.

Charlie was also a member of the company, and it was his duty, by virtue of his occupation, to look after the company's live stock, which consisted entirely of dogs. Actresses in stock companies have a failing for dogs, and there were eight already, and Gyp made nine.

Charlie would have struck openly if he had dared, but Big Bill had a way of getting things he wanted. So Gyp started for Texas.

Gyp was fond of Charlie, for material reasons. This had no effect on Charlie's animosity, which rather increased with better acquaintance, and became a matter of comment to the other members of the company.

Therefore, when Gyp was unceremoniously kicked off the back platform of the moving train some three miles out of Alamogordo, the only one who was surprised was Gyp.

Gyp rolled like a ball for a dozen yards in the soft sand, and then got up and shook himself. He ran after the receding train a while and barked, but without effect. Then he sat down to inspect the country and, being a philosopher, forgot about the train.

A Topeka dog suddenly dropped in the middle of a New Mexico desert finds lots of new things to interest him.

The first new thing was a jack-rabbit, which jumped up right in front of him. It looked strange, but it ran, and so Gyp pursued it. This was good sport, but discouraging, especially if one is not accustomed to breathing in a high altitude, and after a few miles he gave it up.

He jumped at lizards till dark, which is less fatiguing, if less exciting. Then he curled up under a soap-

weed and slept till daylight on an empty stomach. Which is literal.

He awoke to find a coyote watching him suspiciously. Gyp was very hungry, but he doubted if coyotes were good eating. He growled and bristled, hoping the thing would run away.

It didn't, so Gyp left it, trying to appear dignified and not to hurry. After half a mile he dared to look back. Thank goodness, the thing wasn't following him.

In the distance he caught sight of the roofs of Alamogordo, shining through the mesquit. He instantly connected houses with food, for he was very hungry, and he started for them. The desert was no place for a tenderfoot.

On the way in he could not resist chasing one more jack-rabbit. He knew it was useless, but it ran from him, and he needed something to make him feel brave after the episode of the coyote. He thought his wind acted better this time, but it made his hunger simply frightful.

After this he went straight, only stopping to wonder at a flock of mountain quail. They also ran from him, and he estimated that they were not as fast as a rabbit. But he knew birds, and let them go; like as not the mean things would start to fly the minute he caught up to them.

That town was a good deal farther off than he had thought. But at last he reached cultivated land, and got a drink out of a ditch.

There were a lot of these ditches, and some of them had leaked over whole fields. Wherever a ditch had leaked the desert had stopped. This interested Gyp, but he didn't understand it.

He didn't bother much with the farms. They all had dogs, and Gyp knew that one dog to a family was usually enough. Only stock companies went in for dogs in quantities. So he kept right on until he reached the main street of the town.

There were trees on this street, and it was cool and quiet, and had familiar smells. Then one delicious smell floated down and blotted out all the rest. Gyp raised his head and sniffed in pleasurable anticipation.

I'm not sure that the phrase "to follow one's nose" was invented to apply to yellow dogs, but it is certain that it was more than a motto to Gyp —it was the law of life.

Gyp followed his nose, and in a few minutes was enjoying a feast of the vision through the half-open door of Mr. Wiggle's bakery.

Mr. Wiggle was a large man in every direction — the size you always expect in a good cook or a good baker. And Mr. Wiggle was a German, and a good baker.

Gyp loved him at sight. He always loved bakers—it was his religion. When he was a puppy his mother had told him that if he was good he might some day be the dog of a baker. Mothers of puppies have a habit of doing this, the same as mothers of boys telling them that they may some day be President.

Mr. Wiggle, with sleeves rolled high, was stirring rich, dark dough with the arm of a smith. Gyp watched entranced, with slowly wagging tail.

Mr. Wiggle suspended operations to inspect the oven. Through the door Gyp caught sight of billows and billows of fresh bread. A thumb test proved satisfactory, and the pans of bread were removed by means of a broad wooden paddle on the end of a long pole—over three hundred loaves, each loaf looking as if it had been especially baked for a competition.

The motion of Gyp's tail was perceptibly increased.

The bread was deposited in tiers on the scoured pine shelves, and Mr. Wiggle turned again to the dark-brown dough. Satisfied with its consistency at last, a hunk was rolled into a long sausage, and this was pinched into pieces as big as plums by the thumb and forefinger as rapidly and accurately as if by machine.

Then taking a piece in each hand, Mr. Wiggle rounded them by the simple method of rolling them on his tight white apron, over that part of the anatomy which gave them their name "belly-rubs." The more proper, and, perhaps, better known name is circus-cakes, for though they go into the oven round, they come out flat and crisp and familiar, deeply veined and irresistible.

Gyp, still unobserved, watched every movement. The pans were filled and went into the oven on the same long paddle that had removed the bread.

In a surprisingly short time they were done and the pans were cooling on the floor, while the aroma of fresh circus-cakes flooded the bakery, floated out of the shop and up and down the quiet street, threatening to attract all who passed to the half-open door.

Gyp's tail was working furiously now, so that there seemed danger of its flying off by centrifugal force. Two other dogs joined him—fat, well-fed family dogs, who came merely for the smell, as a sort of substitute for the after-dinner cigar.

But if the local dogs could be satisfied with the smell, this was not the case with Gyp. Even the fresh "weenies" at Charlie Sands's hot-dog cart had never tempted him thus. Gyp was prepared to sell his reputation for honesty for one of those fresh cakes. But then Gyp's reputation for honesty where food was concerned was never worth very much.

The opportunity came, and Gyp, with the quick instincts of vagrancy, observed it. Mr. Wiggle looked at his work and saw that it was good. Then he turned to the water-pail with its long-handled iron dipper, for baking is thirsty business.

In an instant Gyp was through the door. The two local dogs watched him—first with astonishment, then with pity—but Gyp heeded them not.

At the edge of the nearest pan Gyp turned for a quick look at Mr. Wiggle. At that same moment Mr. Wiggle chanced to glance down from his dipper. He caught Gyp's eye with understanding. The jig was up!

If Gyp had departed then it is likely that he would have gotten safely away, for he could move like a thought when necessary. But the intoxication for circus-cakes was upon him. He made one frantic grab, caught one in his teeth, and started for the door.

That extra second was Gyp's undoing. The iron dipper with the long handle started flying through the air, accompanied by the expressive word "Git!"

Gyp was "gitting" as fast as he knew how, but as he reached the door something struck his hind leg. He dropped his precious circus-cake with a yell of pain and hurtled out into the street.

The two local dogs had retired to a safe distance and watched the exit with amused "I told you so" expressions. They had learned their lessons long before and felt superior.

Poor Gyp got across the street on three legs and hid behind some iron roofing piled against the fence. He had stopped yelping when he reached cover, but his hind leg hung down and pained him terribly. He leaned over and began to lick with caution where the bone turned an unnatural angle. It was broken.

When Mr. Wiggle reached the door Gyp was nowhere to be seen. This was not a new game for him—the game of a dog and the cakes and the iron dipper—the door would get left open and the odors of his wares were most inviting.

But Mr. Wiggle was a kindly man and bore no malice. He looked upon the disciplining of dogs much the same as on the disciplining of children—a disagreeable task, but for their own good and not a protest against their existence.

When he hit the mark with the dipper he would throw out a cake as a tentative peace-offering, knowing from experience that it would in no way detract from the moral effect of the lesson. Now, the cake that Gyp had

dropped was tossed into the street and promptly eaten by one of the well-fed local dogs.

Mr. Wiggle picked up his dipper and returned to his work well pleased, which would not have been the case had he known of the pitiful yellow dog behind the iron roofing, nearly starved and nursing a broken leg.

Poor Gyp was discouraged. He had been hurt before, many times, by kicks and stones and sticks, and in twenty fights with dogs and one—only one—with a cat.

With bites and bruises he was familiar, but this was different — it hurt more and made his leg queer and useless—and in his dog mind he knew this was serious. Even to such a confirmed optimist as he was by nature, the future looked black.

Nobody loved a yellow dog — nobody cared whether he lived or not. If he should venture forth now in broad daylight some one would shoot him. He remembered seeing a dog that had been hit by an automobile, and his hind leg had dragged in the same way, and a man had shot him, and a lot of ladies in the automobile had said it was a good thing, because it put him out of his suffering.

Gyp was suffering now more than he had ever thought it possible to suffer, but it never occurred to him to go out in hope that some one would shoot him. Nobody had ever told him about the Happy Hunting-Ground in the Hereafter, and death held no prospects. He stayed out of sight and suffered and starved.

Somewhere there is a story told of a man whose punishment for sin in this world is to suffer from thirst through eternity, though up to his chin in water. We gasp with horror at the picture this brings before us.

There are tales aplenty of men who have starved in sight of most tempting eatables, placed just out of reach by inhuman torturers. Again we shudder.

Now picture to yourself a little yellow dog between a fence and a piece of iron roofing, nursing a broken leg and starving—actually starving—while from across the street floats the fragrance of fresh bread and cakes and doughnuts—everything that can make a dog's life worth while.

Gyp tried to doze, but the pain made that impossible. So he lay still and suffered and listened.

Four o'clock struck and school let out, disgorging its swarm of children in all directions, like sparks from a pinwheel.

Then five o'clock came, and he heard Mr. Wiggle close his shop for the night and go into his house, which was built adjoining the bakery, connected by an inner door.

At six the sound of a phonograph came faintly from the front parlor. Mr. Wiggle was enjoying his well-earned relaxation to the tune of a genuine German band.

Now enter Bill Wiggle, Mr. Wiggle's sturdy, tow-headed son.

Bill was nine, and his ambition in life was to become a professional ball-player. His left hand was decorated with the regulation twenty-five-cent mitt, and in his right hand he scientifically thumbed the regulation twenty-five-cent ball. He had finished his supper, and was out for a few minutes' pitching practise before going to bed.

He looked up the street and down the street in search of a catcher, but no catcher was to be seen. This was disappointing, but Bill also was an optimist.

The solid adobe wall of the bakery would make a fine back-stop, and the rebound of the ball would be more saving of time than the returns from the catcher.

With a piece of white chalk he encircled a portion of the wall sufficient in his estimation to equal the strike zone. Then he withdrew the regulation distance for the game of three-old-cat, balanced professionally on one foot for a moment, and shot one of his famous out-drops at the white circle.

Why that particular out-drop failed to drop Bill never understood. Certainly he held it the way so clearly explained in the Boys' Baseball Guide, which he had in his pocket at the time; held it the way he always held an out-drop, threw it the same way, and waited confidently for the result.

There was no doubt that he had the out-twist correct—the ball started on an out and kept going out farther and farther until it struck. But instead of a drop, that perverse twenty-five-center took a distinct rise.

When it struck it went neatly through a pane of one of the bakery windows, some fifteen feet from the white circle.

Bill Wiggle looked incredulously at the broken pane. Was it possible that he could have made a shot like that?

He looked around—the street was empty—no one else could have thrown the ball. From the distant front parlor came the strains of a German band—evidently Mr. Wiggle had not been disturbed.

At that moment Bill unconsciously blessed the inventor of German bands. Should he run in and tell his father what had happened? This would be hard to do, for Mr. Wiggle was not interested in the science of the out-drop, and Bill knew from experience that there would be little sympathy. He knew also that his father considered the disciplining of children as necessary as the disciplining of dogs, though disagreeable.

Then why take this time to confess when Mr. Wiggle was enjoying himself? It would spoil both their evenings. It would be much better for everybody to wait until morning.

But Billy must get his ball. To leave the ball there over night would be the height of folly. Near the window stood a large upright piano-crate.

It had been there a long time, ever since the piano had come—for Mr. Wiggle had not yet decided whether to merely rent the piano or buy it. If Billy could turn it over once it would easily reach to the middle of the window.

He tried—it was not heavy—he turned it. Now to get on top. It was high and hollow, and to shin up would make too much noise.

Near-by was a pile of long two-by-four planks. Bill raised the end of one and was able to place it on top of the piano-case. Then he walked quickly up the inclined plane, unlatched the window by putting his hand through the hole made by the ball, carefully lowered the upper half, stepped through to the sill inside, felt his way round a table piled high with empty pans, and discovered the ball in the middle of the floor.

Back he climbed and the trick was done.

So far so good. But it would never do to leave a big hole in the window all night. The night was full of cats, and they could climb, and a cat in the bakery was something Bill knew his father could not stand. A short way down the street, near the lumber-yard, Bill remembered having seen an old pair of trousers, and they might be there still.

Luck was with him again, and he found them. They were weak with age, and he was able to tear out a generous piece—a piece that contained the two rear suspender buttons and most of the seat.

He returned to the top of the crate and, leaning over the window-frame, tucked the cloth in the jagged hole. The window had a spring lock, and would fasten itself when raised.

Suddenly Bill stopped and listened. There sounded a heavy tread on the other side of the connecting door—the German-band side.

"Hi! Git out of there!"

There was no doubt about it. It was his father's voice. The command was strange, considering the circumstances; but Bill knew better than to disobey. He had been told to git, and he got.

Down the inclined plane he dashed, and round the house. And then, not being pursued, he decided that he was

tired and would go to bed, and there await whatever might happen.

Gyp woke about midnight, with a fierce aching in his leg. With consciousness came hunger, and he realized that he must eat to live, and eat immediately.

Painfully he dragged himself from behind the roofing and sniffed at the night. Opposite was the bakery, and from an open window came a faint smell of circus-cake.

In front of the window was a big box, with a board leading to the top. Gyp went to investigate, and soon found himself on top of the box, peering into the blackness of the room below.

The smell of circus-cake was strong, and weakly a little tail began to wag. Gyp felt over the edge with one foot. It landed on a bunch of cloth. Grasping the cloth with his teeth, he let himself over, the pain in his leg almost making him yelp as it bumped against the edge.

He was hanging now, and in a moment he would be on the sill below, and then—

And then the cloth he was biting loosened and came out, and he fell backward, striking a pile of pans. Down he went, and *rattle! bang! bang!* came the pans on top of him.

"Mine goodness!" cried Mr. Wiggle, and was half-way down the stairs, a revolver in one hand and a pillow in the other, before the last pan fell.

Mrs. Wiggle stopped to light a candle, and then followed as fast as she could, with the result that the candle went out promptly and delayed matters.

They found the bakery empty, save for a little yellow dog with a broken leg, stunned beneath a pile of pans. Tightly gripped in the little dog's teeth was most of the seat of an old pair of trousers.

The window was open wide, a pane of glass was broken, and a box was pushed conveniently outside. Mr. Wiggle looked at everything carefully and drew his own conclusions.

"Mine goodness!" he said again. "Robbers! Und all from the bank—und in the safe— Mine goodness!"

And Mrs. Wiggle took Gyp in her arms and cried a little, because she was frightened. And Gyp recovered and licked her face to show that everything was all right.

And while Mr. Wiggle was removing two heavy bags from the old-fashioned safe in the hall to a safer though more uncomfortable position under his pillow, Mrs. Wiggle filled a big bowl with bread and milk, which certainly looked good to Gyp.

She was a clever woman, and set the broken bone and bound it securely in splints while Gyp was eating. A warm bed was made out of a clothes-basket and an old blanket and a cushion, and Gyp was left in the front parlor.

"Martin," said Mrs. Wiggle, when she was alone with her husband, "promise not to tell Billy about the burglars. The poor lamb would be frightened, and not dare to sleep alone, and be troubled with dreams."

Mr. Wiggle, like the dutiful husband he was, promised.

Bill got up in the morning with a feeling that something was coming to him. But his joy on discovering that the family had at last adopted a real dog did much to make him forget his fear.

When the day passed, and the next, and no mention was made of the broken glass, Bill believed that a miracle had happened, and that Gyp was responsible. He might have brought up the subject himself, but it was a disagreeable thing to talk about, and the Boys' Guide to Baseball was really to blame; and, after all, why should he?

Gyp accepted his new position with his usual philosophy, as a fitting retribution for the broken leg.

Sleek and fat, and the constant companion of the best pitcher for his age in the country, he became an object of envy to all the local dogs.

He certainly had had a streak of dog's luck.

All-Story Table-Talk

A QUESTION OF PRIDE

WE have been looking through THE ALL-STORIES that have come out during the last twelve months and, for one reason or another, have become fairly swollen with pride.

Even though pride is one of the seven deadly sins, in this case we feel it to be defensible, for after all we are not proud so much of our work in the matter as we are of the entertaining stuff we have got hold of.

For instance, if you will consider the list of complete novels we have run throughout 1913, you will see there has been some pretty nifty reading handed to you.

The list is something as follows:

In January we printed "SANDS O' LIFE," by William Patterson White; in February, "THE SECOND MAN," by Lee Robinet; in March, "THE BRAIN BLIGHT," by Jack Harrower; in April, "COWARDS ALL," by William Tillinghast Eldridge; in May, "BARSTOW'S WIFE," by Robert Simpson; in June, "THE BLACK COMET," by J. Earl Clauson; in July, "ANGEL CITIZENS," by William Patterson White; in August, "THE DEVIL AFLOAT," by Chauncey C. Hotchkiss; in September, "THE COPPER PRINCESS," by Perley Poore Sheehan; in October, "THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE," by Stephen Chalmers; in November, "A MAN WITHOUT A SOUL," by Edgar Rice Burroughs; and this month, "A THIEVES' COMEDY," by Simeon Robertson.

If you have traveled along with these stories you have come very close to circling the globe, for you have been in China, Peru, in the Malay Archipelago, in the Caribbean, on the West Coast of Africa, in England, in the great Northwest, amid the Rockies, and in New York.

What's the use of paying out great wads of money for a world's tour when you may so simply and easily make the Grand Tour aboard the good ship ALL-STORY in the company of youthful pirates, famous doctors, famous detectives, beautiful women, cowboys, seafarers, adventurers, emperors, and princesses?

It seems to us that no better company could be desired, and we believe if you will continue the sail with us you will meet a company as cheerful and as unusual as you have played with during this last year.

We feel that after so full an explanation our apparent pride and lack of modesty will be easily condoned. We hope that you feel more or less the same way we do, and that our voyage together will be uninterrupted and practically without termination.

THE "ALL-ABOARD" BUGLE

Our 1914 cruise is about to begin.

All the cargo is aboard and already they are casting off. We suppose, then, it behooves us to tell the passengers a little of the trip they are about to make—not too much, for fear there would be no surprise in store for them, but just enough to pique their curiosity.

Therefore, let us say that our first great point of interest in January will be the complete novel which goes by the name of

THE OUTSIDER

and which was written by J. Earl Clauson. Here is a story of long and bitter nights amid the ice of the Arctic Circle; here is an American girl who finds herself forsaken in a tribe of Eskimos. How the gloom of the night is changed to the glory of the day, and how protection comes to this girl from a young red-headed giant, and what becomes of the love of the two of them is the basis of Mr. Clauson's yarn.

Besides this he has given us a series of thrills and a catalogue of adventures that are away out of the ordinary. He has written brilliantly of the Northland, and sympathetically of those, perhaps, unfortunate folks who were born there and who spend their days in the glare of ancient ice. This is a strong story, and has appeal for both men and women, for the girl in the yarn is very, very human.

There is going to be a new serial, of course, in January, and it is written by a San Francisco man named Charles C. Dobie, and is about a sophisticated people. It is called

A NIGHT'S HARVEST

and as a contrast to Mr. Clauson's yarn it serves splendidly. The oppression of convention, the strength of scandal, and the lastingness of devotion are the points Mr. Dobie makes. He has a cast of only six characters—three men and three women—but each stands for a class in American social conditions, and they work out their individual destinies according to the class to which each belongs.

We are sure you will find this an engrossing novel because it is very true to life, and because it is very sympathetic.

"THE WARLORD OF MARS" will, of course, continue. You will find the story getting better and better as it goes along. It certainly is a sockdologer. And then there will be continuations of "THE HOUSE OF SORCERY" and "NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH."

There are going to be a number of short stories, too, by various people, including Frank Leon Smith, Jack Brant, and Donald A. Kahn.

So you may rest assured that we shall start out on this much-talked-of trip of ours with plenty of interest and plenty of geniality.

A Call for Ginger

CHICAGO, Illinois.

EDITOR THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

For the love of Pete, stir up some ginger in your authors and get them to write some more like Burroughs's "Tarzan of the Apes," "Gods of Mars," "Under the Moons of Mars," *et cetera*. The aforesaid Mr. Burroughs deserves a sentence in the "pen" for not giving us a sequel to the stories on Mars. Your "Martian Glossary" in the October number only served as baiting the bull, and unless you give us some more on *Barsoom* we will rise in rebellion and "put down the yoke of slavery."

Tell Chauncey C. that he will have to give us some more stories whether his devils are "afloat" or "ashore."

Your old numbers containing "Just Like Wyoming," "Forest Reaper," "Prince Imbecile," and "Tarzan of the Apes" I still keep to read over when all else in the reading line is exhausted, so interesting are they.

I consider MacLean Savage's "Mastodon Milk-Man" a good story, and R. T. Stout's "Her Forbidden Knight," and Burroughs's "Cave Girl" equally as good; but I did not like "Hannibal's Oath" or "Pilgrims in Love."

I am an admirer of THE ALL-STORY, though you have not had any of my opinions till now.

Yours in anguish, W. W. M.

Toot out the legends!

"Trash" and "Cheap"

EMPIRE, C. Z.

EDITOR THE ALL-STORY.

DEAR SIR:

Most fiction magazines are interesting,

and are entertaining when time is heavy on one's hands. But once read and they are trash. THE ALL-STORY is different. When you read a story like "Sands o' Life," or "The Invisible Empire," you do not want to throw that away.

THE ALL-STORY you read, carefully save, and reread. Here it is that one finds favorites better with every reading. One who takes THE ALL-STORY has a perpetually increasing library of entertaining, wholesome fiction.

There is much difference between things that are "cheap" and things that are "trash." Poe's "Raven" was sold cheap—but it was not trash!

Certain magazines print "daring," sensational stories. They are trash—but they are not cheap! The average popular fiction magazine—it is trash *and* cheap! THE ALL-STORY is of the "Raven" class—cheap, but *not* trash.

To one who has read several numbers of THE ALL-STORY it has a certain charm, and one "gets the habit"—a desire that no other magazine can satisfy.

Some seem to think that the sensational is low class.

"Gods of Mars" and "The Moons of Mars" are no more trash than Jules Verne's stories. If "Tarzan of the Apes" is trash, so are Kipling and Doyle. Burroughs and Verne, Burroughs and Kipling!

I agree with H. R. B. and L. C. in the October number—get Mr. Burroughs to give us a *series* of *John Carter's* adventures on other planets. *Tarzan* was great.

Give us plenty of scientific and impossible stories. "The Brain Blight," "The Copper Princess," "The Gods of Mars," "Lure of Gold," "Star Dust," and "The Black Comet" were great.

Also give us more wild adventure like "Sands o' Life." "The Invisible Empire," "The Savage," and "On the Trail of an Emperor" were all great.

Give us sequels to "The Copper Princess" and "Gods of Mars." Will you please tell me in what number "Under the Moons of Mars" began? Why not continue the volume index to aid in locating stories and securing missing numbers?

Yours truly,

D. F. A.

Anent The Cave Girl's Life

MIDDLESBORO, Kentucky.

EDITOR TABLE-TALK.

DEAR SIR:

Do you think Burroughs intends to leave the "Cave-Girl" for all time on the island?

He is a splendid writer, but seems to me leaves his stories unfinished.

Yours very truly, C. C. H.

A Patient Waiter

ST. PAUL, Minnesota.

EDITOR ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

Enclosed please find five cents to cover cost of mailing, and fifteen cents to pay for magazine, for which kindly send me the June, 1913, issue of THE ALL-STORY.

I was a little late in going to my dealer's for this copy, and the result was a fruitless hunt among most of the news-stands in the city.

When are we going to get a sequel to "The Gods of Mars?" I am waiting patiently.

Yours for a continuance of imaginary yarns,

R. A. E.

An Original Liar

DETROIT, Michigan.

EDITOR ALL-(GOOD)-STORIES MAGAZINE:

This is from a reader who travels all over the United States where God placed coal and man digs it, and who in the course of fourteen years has seen many wonderful things and horrible things happen miles under the ground where the sun never shines.

I cannot see why Burroughs has overlooked the coal-mine as a field for his wonderful creations.

As an original liar he is supreme, and my greatest pleasure is in wondering if he is really sane.

I insist upon your making THE ALL-STORY a two-a-month publication. It's too darn long to wait, and it seems as though enough of your readers have asked this to receive at least an excuse as to why not.

If you have a reasonable excuse let's hear it. If not, we want and will have a two-a-month ALL-(GOOD)-STORIES.

Yours,

D. M. R.

Slogan: "Two a month or bust!"

Burroughs in Bookform

ALTUS, Oklahoma.

EDITOR THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

I am writing you to find out if there is any possible way of getting three of E. R. Burroughs's stories in bookform. Would like to have "Under the Moons of Mars," "The Gods of Mars," and "Tarzan of the Apes."

I have been reading THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE for a long time, so long I have forgotten just when I did get the first number. Wish you would let me knew at once whether I can get the three stories in bookform or not, at any price.

Yours truly,

J. E. F., JR.

Burroughs Dead?

PARACALE, A. C. Luzon, P. I.

EDITOR ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

Tender my most heartfelt sympathy to the friends and relatives of Mr. E. R. Burroughs. His death must have been very sudden. I liked his stories very much. It is too bad he could not have finished "The Gods of Mars."

Am sending money for October, 1912, ALL-STORY. Mine did not reach me. If you have one, or can get it, please send it to me.

I have been with THE ALL-STORY for several years. It gets here a month behind. You know how good it is, so there is no use to try and tell you, because I can't.

Very truly yours,

G. M.

Mr. Monahan's Cover

LONDON, England.

EDITOR ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

If you continue to maintain the same standard of excellence as that demonstrated by the cover design illustrating an incident in "The Copper Princess" in the September issue of THE ALL-STORY, your covers should certainly lack nothing in color-magnetism, for if covers are to be as suns to thaw the snows of magazine skepticism, one, at least, has served its purpose.

A long life to Monahan—magazine editors need him.

A. H.

"The Invisible Empire" Ace High

NEW YORK, New York.

EDITOR THE ALL-STORY.

I want to compliment you on "The Invisible Empire." It was ace-high. I was almost sorry it was not a serial story that I might have enjoyed the suspense and anticipation of the sequel. Can't you induce Mr. Chalmers to write a story of ancient Egypt?

"The Copper Princess" was immense. I feel sure your readers would like to hear more of the Incas. I had an almost irresistible impulse to visit the Museum of Natural History and ask to be shown "our" Copper Princess.

If Mr. Burroughs does not leave *John Carter* and his bride in a safe position at the conclusion of his next Mars story I will appeal to the rest of your readers for entrants to an expedition to save both of them.

With best wishes for a continued run of your good stories,

Yours very truly,

E. L. B.

Ghosts and Weird Happenings

LONDON, England.

DEAR EDITOR:

Am hurrying this through to you with the suggestion that the December ALL-STORY should be a double number after the fashion of our English magazines. Failing this, give us such a treat to commence the New Year with. You will have appreciative remarks from all your readers, and you must have plenty of reading matter to absolutely satisfy all tastes.

In the October number of the good old magazine, I. C. D. asks for something "creepy." I am in accord.

How many times have I crept up to the room of sleep with hair raised and "nerves" galore when such yarns have been running in your earlier numbers.

Remember the "Circular Staircase"? Yes, let us have some "ghosts," haunted rooms, weird happenings, *et cetera*. What could be more seasonable for the winter editions?

Glad to have secured you a couple of new readers.

Excuse such a long epistle; but think it over!

Best wishes from,

P. A. W.

Mr. Cass and Diplomacy

CHICAGO, Illinois.

EDITOR THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

The story "Pilgrims in Love," in your October issue, is a very sweet, dainty story of Orientalism that should appeal to any reader of fiction.

Mr. De Lysle F. Cass is to be complimented on the diplomatic way he has handled a very difficult subject—Oriental love.

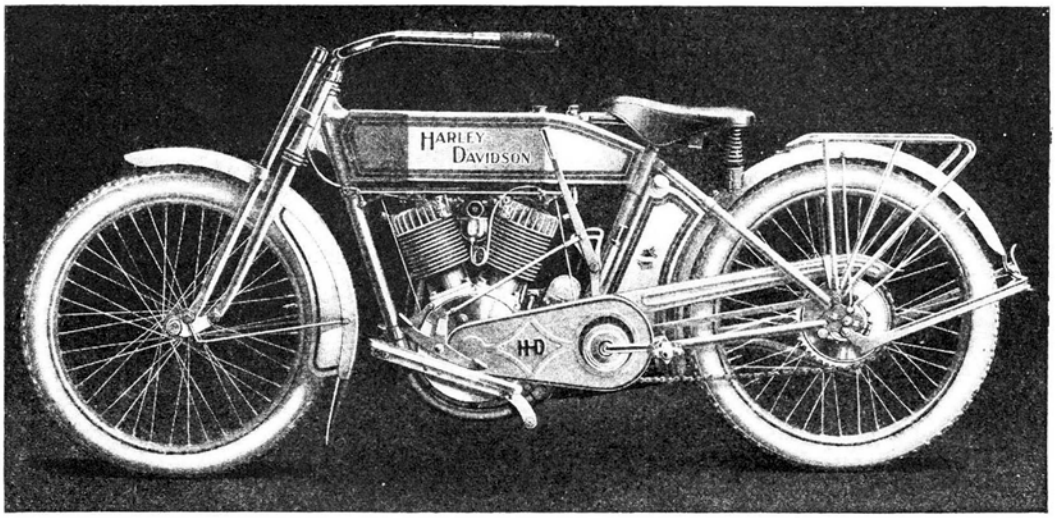
Hope to see more of his work in THE ALL-STORY.

Very truly yours,

G. W. S.

Startling Exclusive Improvements

Step Starter — Selective Two-Speed — Double — Folding Foot Boards — Ful-Floteing



THE Harley-Davidson models for 1914 are marked for the innovations they present. Innovations, but not experiments, for every feature, every improvement, every refinement has stood the test of months and months of hard road service, for the makers of the Harley-Davidson never have and never will foist onto the public any so-called improvement in an experimental stage.

Step Starter Starts Machine With Rider in the Saddle and Both Wheels on the Ground.

The step starter—another new and exclusive feature of the Harley-Davidson furnishes the only practical method of starting a motorcycle yet offered to the public.

A downward push on either pedal spins the engine sufficiently to start it. This does away with the necessity of putting the machine on the stand to start, as the step starter can be used when both wheels are on the ground.

If the motor becomes stalled at any time it is no longer necessary to hold up traffic in a crowded street, find a level place in the road, get off in the mud, and set the machine on the stand to start it. A simple push on the pedal and the engine again begins to throb.

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PRODUCERS OF HIGH GRADE MOTORCYCLES

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Selective Type of Two-Speed

The Harley-Davidson selective type of two-speed we believe to be not only the most simple but the most compact and efficient that has been placed on the market. It is located inside the rear hub, thus avoiding dust, dirt or damage. Its speeds are selective and the rider can shift from low to high or high to low or to neutral at any time whether the machine is standing still or in motion. After thousands and thousands of miles of use on experimental models we are absolutely convinced that this is without question the most satisfactory type of two-speed that has ever been built.

Double Brake Control

The brake on the new Harley-Davidson can be operated either by a foot lever on the right foot board or by back pedaling on either pedal. All models are equipped with the Harley-Davidson band brake.

Double Control of Free Wheel

Free Wheel Control now can be operated either by foot lever on the left foot board or by a hand lever. The foot lever control is an innovation which does away with all fumbling or feeling for the control lever and permits a much more rapid engaging or dis-engaging of the Free Wheel Control by the rider.

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All models are equipped with folding foot boards. In addition to the foot boards the pedals are retained. The foot boards are unusually long thus permitting a great variety of positions according to the height of the rider. This overcomes the great objection to the ordinary type of foot boards. They were built to fit the ordinary man and consequently the purchaser who was a little taller or a little shorter had to suffer from the uncomfortable position his height forced him to assume.

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After building over 24,000 Harley-Davidsons incorporating the Ful-Floteing Seat, no possible method of improvement has suggested itself. This seat has proven itself absolutely to be the greatest comfort device ever offered. Floating, as it does, the weight of the rider between two concealed, compressed springs it assimilates all the jars and vibrations due to rough roads. It is equally sensitive to the small rut and big bump. It is impossible for it to strike bottom and there is no rebound.

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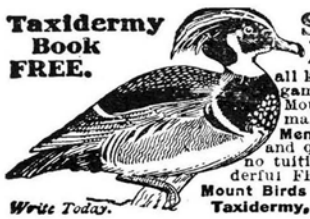

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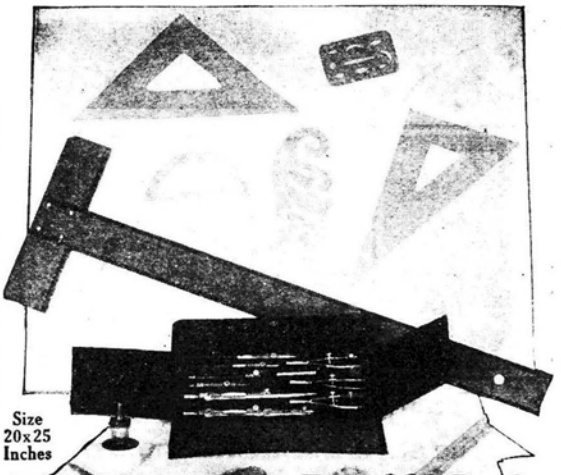

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JUST one of the hundreds of letters this department is constantly receiving, proves conclusively how profitable any live-wire will find a careful perusal of the advertisements appearing in this section each month.

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> "I wish to acknowledge having received many valuable propositions which I have to attribute to your Agents' Bureau. I sincerely hope others will also benefit, and if there are any fees or dues or contributions to make, I shall be pleased to comply."

This is only an example of the letters we are receiving from ambitious Agents throughout the country—wide awake hustlers who appreciate the splendid money-making opportunities this section offers to all who will grasp them.

There are no fees or costs of any sort necessary to enable ***YOU*** to benefit by the exceptional chances for profit offered in these columns. All you need do is read these manufacturers' announcements each month and then write to them for further information.

And in order that we may keep in closer touch with you—help you in your efforts to increase your own income and become independent—simply fill out and mail the attached coupon ***NOW.*** To do so costs but a postage stamp—to neglect the opportunity may cost you the chance you have long been seeking.

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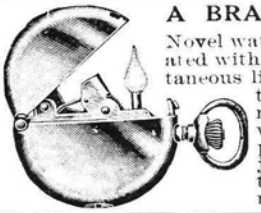
for use by hand to retail at $1.00. In demand by both sexes. Perfect results in facial and scalp massage, in developing the bust, removing wrinkles and hollows, blackheads, pimples, etc. Brings rosy tint to cheeks. Works wonders!



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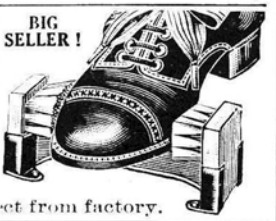
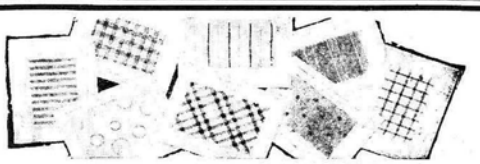
Because it's common sense every woman wants it; as it now costs but 50c, she'll want several; they save her lots of work and last forever; they save the shoes and save the carpets. Best and most practical shoe cleaner ever offered at any price. Price is low because you buy them direct from factory.

BIG SELLER!



Important Instructions: In order to secure an agency for any of these novelties, write at once—a post card is sufficient—and full prices and terms will be sent you by return mail. We supply these articles to you low enough in price to enable you to make a handsome profit. Our profit-sharing plan is one of the fairest propositions now open to hustling agents.

THE A. C. BRANDT CO., 148 Duane Street, New York



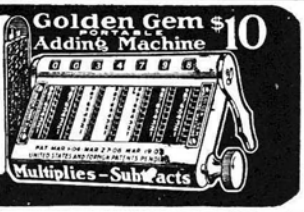
WE WANT RELIABLE AGENTS

to show our beautiful and exclusive line of **Shirt Waist and Suit Materials, Handkerchiefs,** etc. This is an exceptional opportunity for you. Excellent territory. No experience required. **Samples FREE.**

MITCHELL & CHURCH CO., 242 Water St., Binghamton, N. Y.

Over 80,000 in Use
Mostly sold by recommendation. **For Personal Desk or General Office.**
It checks mental calculations. Handsome Morocco case free.
Buy Thru Your Stationer.
Write for 10 day trial offer.
A. B. Dancher, A. A. M. Co.,
149 W. Broadway, New York City

Golden Gem Adding Machine $10



Agents Wanted

Multiplies—Subtracts

CLIMAX SMOKELESS ODORLESS FRY PAN

Cooks all food juicy and tender, browns beautifully; no odors to attract flies or destroy the appetite of the one who prepares the meals. No steam condensing on portieres, furniture or clothing, to breed germs; saves the price of itself many times over. Size, diameter 11 in. Prepaid $1.50. **AGENTS WANTED.**

CONNOLLY COMPANY
123 LIBERTY STREET, NEW YORK CITY

The Argosy Combination Agents' Bureau

AGENTS

Here's what they all want. Sell "Ambrew" Concentrated Extract for Making Beer at Home.

Strictly legitimate. Enormous demand, sells fast, coins you money. Small, compact; carry in your pocket. Territory going fast. No experience required. All or spare time. The season is on, get ready for the warm weather—the big thirst. If $50 a week or more looks good to you—send postal today.

THE AMBREW COMPANY, Dept. 1863, Cincinnati, O.

Easy Money for You

Selling to Merchants, Clerks, Mechanics and Young Men and Women who are looking for a Profitable Employment, the

LITHOLIA Complete Course

In Show Card and Sign Writing and Seven LITHOLIA Colors with necessary Brushes

Sells like wildfire everywhere. No trouble in making $3 to $12 a day. Others are doing it; you can do it. We furnish you with leads everywhere. Write for information and vacant territory to

THE LITHOLIA COLOR CO.

59 West 23rd St., New York City

AGENTS

You can sell every woman from one to ten 25c boxes. If you can drive a nail you can easily make $10 a day by hanging all the pictures in the house. All you carry is a small hammer and

Anchor Picture Hooks

If you can sell Dept., Hardware Stores and Dealers, we will give you unoccupied territory. Hang pictures this wonderful, easy way without ugly wire. No molding or ladder needed. Pictures hang straight at all times. Hooks are adjustable, invisible in use, simple and strong. Pictures hung up or taken down as easily as you put on or take off your hat. **Send 25c now for special salesman's outfit to start selling at once, or send postal card for further information.**

BUFFALO-DEHN CO., 700 White Bldg., Buffalo, N.Y.

Ladies Make $15 to $25 Weekly

Selling our complete line of Sanitary Specialties for Women and Children. No money required—all or spare time—not sold in stores. We manufacture all our goods—save jobber's profit by buying direct from us. Send for catalog.

The Holley Co., Dept. 189, Rochester, N. Y.

MENDETS

A PATENT PATCH

Mend leaks instantly in all utensils, granitewares, aluminum, tin, brass, hot water bags, etc. No solder, cement or rivet. Any one can use them. Send for sample box, 10c; large box, all sizes, 25c, postpaid. Agents Wanted. Collette Mfg. Co., Box 305, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AGENTS

HERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY to make from $10 to $25 a day. **Sell Concentrated Liquor Extracts for making Liquors and Cordials of all kinds at home.** Something entirely new, a longfelt want filled, every home a user. Simple and easy. Saves over 50%. A few minutes does the work. **Strictly legitimate, no license required**—can be sold anywhere, wet or dry. Enormous demand, sells fast, coins you money. Small, compact, carry weeks supply in pocket. Exclusive territory being snapped up—all or spare time—be quick—no experience necessary. SEND POSTAL today for Sample Outfit and full particulars.

UNIVERSAL IMPORT CO., Dept. 3667, Cincinnati, Ohio

MAKE $60.00 WEEKLY

Men, yes, and women, too, should make from $60.00 to $100.00 per week, acting as my special sales representative in their county, taking orders, appointing agents, and advertising the **Robinson Folding Bath Tub.** Undoubtedly the most remarkable invention for the home in 20 years. Solves the bathing problem. Any room a bath room. No pipes, no plumbing, no expense. Full length baths with the **Robinson Folding Tub.** Folds in roll, handy as an umbrella. Self-Emptying. Cannot leak.

Look Here; Two Sales a Day Means $60.00 Weekly

Men, that's big money. To show you that this big, easy profit is being made, read these records:

N. T. Smith, Toledo, is making as high as $90.00 weekly. Meyers, Cascade, Wis., profits, first month, $250.00. Beasley, Omaha, reported seven sales in four hours, profit $35.00. Canadian firm wired for prices on 1,000 tubs, now selling 100 tubs weekly through agents.

Come, fall in line. Don't let doubt drag you back. You need little capital, no experience. I furnish everything. Just drop me a post-card. If you're honest and a hustler, I'll give you the job. But act quickly. Write at once. Good for you.

PRES. THE ROBINSON CABINET MFG. CO.

202 Vance St., Toledo, O.

OWN A BRANCH AGENCY

WHEN you represent us it is just the same as though you had your own factory and your own business, for you become our representative and handle six patented specialties of proven merit. Your contract is for exclusive territory: "Boss" Clothes Rack, "Neversag" Clothes Line Bracket, "Security" Door Holder, "Nu-Pantz" Creaser, "New Idea" Hose Supporter, Automatic "Clean" Curry Comb sell on sight and the fact that you have your own business and customers repeat for you soon leads to a large and permanent business of your own.

NO CHARGE FOR TERRITORY RIGHTS

Ask for details of our Thousand Dollar Contract. It is a wonder and will astonish you when you have grasped its wonderful possibilities as a great money maker for you. Territories are going rapidly, so write us at once.

MODERN SPECIALTY COMPANY

32nd Street, Racine, Wisconsin

BLUE BIRD

AGENTS Are Making Money Handling This Clever Specialty

Every boy and girl wants one of these graceful flyers; they rise 100 feet and fly 1000 feet. Handle it as a side-line and sell it to the little ones after you've sold their mother. You add to your earnings without making an extra call. "Blue Birds" are quick sellers and turn in a big profit. Our agents' proposition is a winner—write today.

Sample to agents—$1.00 prepaid.

IDEAL AEROPLANE SUPPLY CO.

74-86 West Broadway New York

WASH WITH COMPRESSED AIR

THE RAPID VACUUM WASHER

PRICE $1.50 AND $3.00

THE NEW WAY

NO wear, no tear. Daintiest articles washed without injury. Tub of clothes washed in 5 to 10 minutes. A child can operate it. It is well made and light as a washboard. Instantaneously attachable to any stationary, ordinary wooden or sheet metal tub.

Send for 30 day trial offer and terms to agents.

STEWART-SKINNER CO.

107 Cherry Street - Worcester, Mass.

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, published monthly at New York, N. Y., required by the Act of August 24th, 1912.

NOTE—This statement is to be made in duplicate, both copies to be delivered by the publisher to the Postmaster, who will send one copy to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Classification), Washington, D. C., and retain the other in the files of the Post Office.

Editor—T. N. Metcalf, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.
Managing Editor—T. N. Metcalf, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.
Business Manager—Wm. T. Dewart, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.
Publisher—The Frank A. Munsey Company, 175 5th Ave., New York, N. Y.

Owners: (If a corporation, give names and addresses of stockholders holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of stock.)

Frank A. Munsey, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.

Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against The Frank A. Munsey Company.

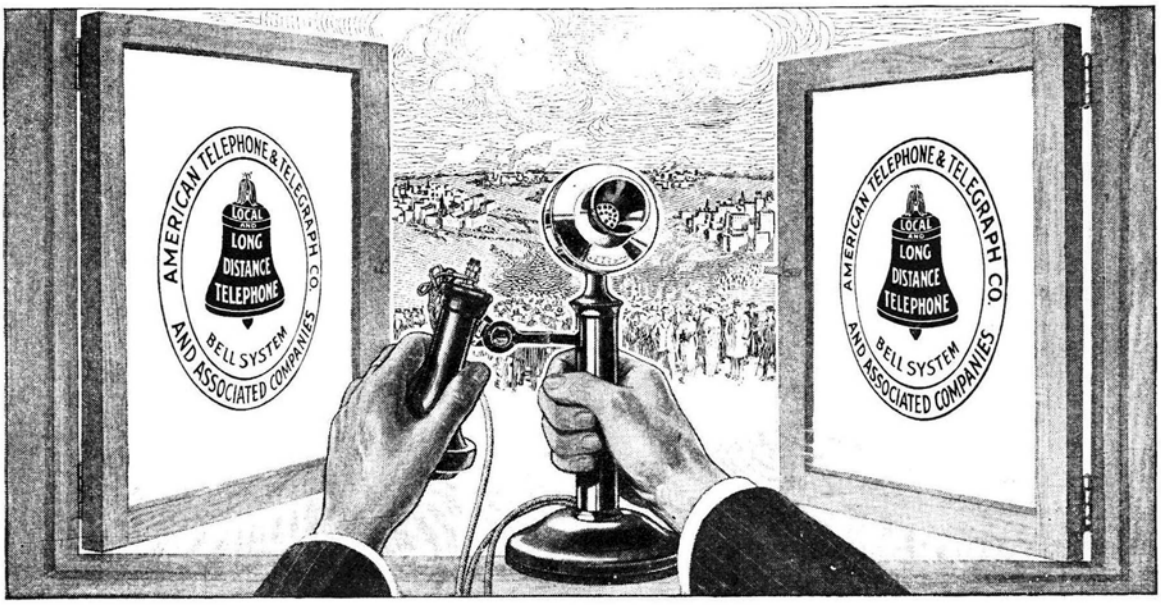
WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

SEAL

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1913.

F. G. RUDOLPH, Notary Public, New York County, No. 138.

(My commission expires March 30, 1914.)



The Telephone Doors of the Nation

WHEN you lift the Bell Telephone receiver from the hook, the doors of the nation open for you.

Wherever you may be, a multitude is within reach of your voice. As easily as you talk across the room, you can send your thoughts and words, through the open doors of Bell Service, into near-by and far-off states and communities.

At any hour of the day or night, you can talk instantly, directly with whom you choose, one mile, or a hundred, or two thousand miles away.

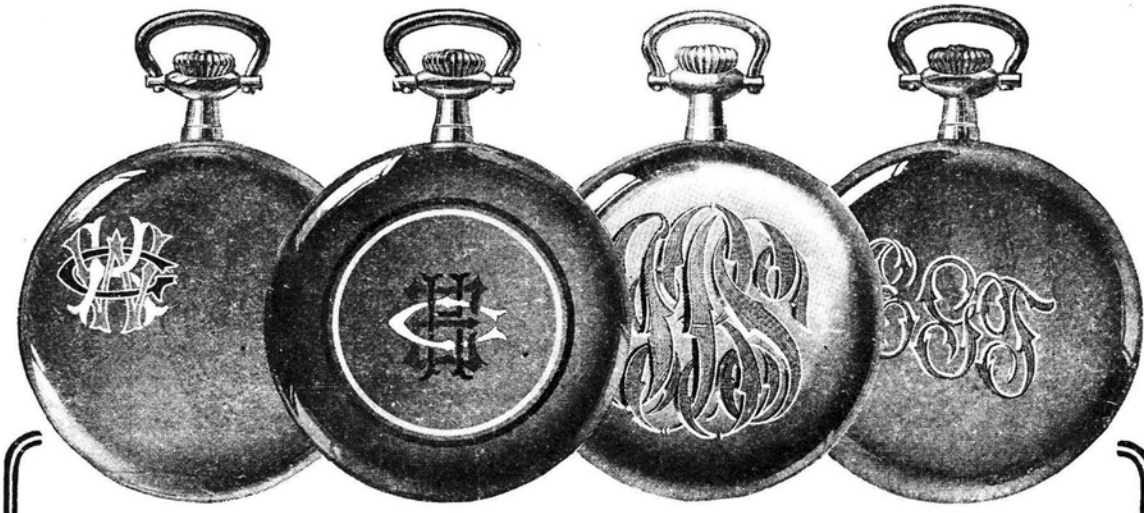
This is possible because 7,500,000 telephones, in every part of our country, are connected and work together in the Bell System to promote the interests of the people within the community and beyond its limits.

It is the duty of the Bell System to make its service universal, giving to everyone the same privilege of talking anywhere at any time.

Because as the facilities for direct communication are extended, the people of our country are drawn closer together, and national welfare and contentment are promoted.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY
AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy ***One System*** ***Universal Service***



The 1914 Timepiece

The ***masterpiece*** *of watch manufacture—the* ***Burlington Special****—19 jewels,* ***adjusted*** *to the second—***adjusted** *to positions—***adjusted** *to temperatures—* ***adjusted*** *to isochronism. Open face or hunting case, ladies' or gentlemen's.*

Special Burlington Offer!

The Superb Burlington Watch **now** at the *direct* rock-bottom price — the same price that **even the wholesale** jeweler must pay—and in order to encourage everybody to secure this watch at once, pay this rock-bottom price, either for cash or $2.50 a month on this great special offer! We send the watch on approval, **prepaid.** You risk absolutely nothing—you pay nothing, not one cent, unless you want this *exceptional* offer after seeing and thoroughly inspecting the watch. Read the coupon below.

New Book on Watches!

Send Free Coupon

FREE Book Coupon

Learn the inside facts about watch prices, and the many superior points of the Burlington over double-priced products. Just send the coupon or a letter or a postal. Get this offer while it lasts.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1089 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches and a copy of your $1,000 challenge, with full explanation of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd.
Chicago
Dept.
1089

Name.....

Address.....

New Ideas In Watch Cases!

Newest Ideas: Inlay Enamel Monograms, Block and Ribbon Monograms, Diamond Set, Lodge, French Art, Dragon Designs.

Open face or hunting case, ladies' or gentlemen's 12 and 16 sizes.

Imagine a beautiful hunting case with your own monogram on one side and the emblem of your lodge or any other emblem on the other side. Our catalog shows complete illustrations. See coupon.

The Movement!

In connection with our sweeping *direct* offer we have selected our **finest** highest grade watch for a special offer direct to the people. **Material:** *The best that money can buy.* **Workmen:** *World renowned experts in their line.*

The Jewels: 19 finest grade selected genuine imported rubies and sapphires, absolutely flawless. (It is well understood in the railroad business that 19 jewels is the proper number for maximum efficiency.)

Factory Fitted and factory tested. Fitted right at the factory into the case made for that watch—and *re-timed* after fitting. No looseness or wearing of the parts. No rattle or jar.

Adjustment: *Adjusted to temperature* AND *isochronism* AND *positions.* The most rigid tests.

That $1,000.00 Challenge

money still lies in the bank waiting, waiting for four years for someone who dares to make a competitive test with the Burlington Special. Ever since we dared to come out with our DIRECT OFFER at the **rock bottom** price, we have been waiting for someone to cover the challenge money in a test with the *higher priced* products. Why **don't** they accept? Look at a Burlington Special, the perfect works the exquisite case, consider the rock bottom price, and **you'll** know why our challenge stands unaccepted!

Missing Page: Inside Back Cover

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info@pulpmags.org

Missing Page: Back Cover

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